

*By the same Author:*

**OUR MOTHERS, 1870-1900**  
(in collaboration)

**OURSELVES, 1900-1930**

# TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THAT the attitude of the world in general, and of women in particular, towards sex relationships has undergone profound change in the last hundred years, I think no one can deny. That the change of attitude is less widespread than those who regard the old attitude as wrong would like to believe, I think is probable. But that it is there, and is gaining ground, I am convinced. To take but one indication of this, it is permissible nowadays for the writers of stories appearing in the twopenny fiction weeklies to send their hero and heroine away on a week-end together before marriage—a situation that would have been unthinkable to any writer of such fiction thirty years ago.

A large percentage—possibly a majority—of girls in the suburbs still look to a husband to provide them with a livelihood; but many feel strongly the need to retain their independence by continuing after marriage the employment for which they have been trained. Parents are franker with their children about birth and sex; lovers and married couples are franker about their relationship with each other. The old poisonous secracies, masquerading as modesty and decency, are dying.

In this book I have attempted to trace the social history of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

in so far as it has a bearing on this changed attitude towards sex. That history shows a steady growth in the education of woman, a steady improvement in her economic position, both in marriage and outside it, a steady opening of the public mind to the darker aspects of social life. Increased knowledge has brought greater understanding, and greater understanding has brought new conceptions of sexual honesty and of right conduct between men and women.

Such a study as this inevitably deals in the main with the middle classes. Though they constitute the lesser half of the population of Great Britain, yet theirs was, and still is, the ethic that governs the law and its administration ; theirs was, and still is, the point of view that is projected in most books and in the press. Working men and women, who form the majority of the population, are only now beginning to play an articulate part in the social life of the nation ; during most of the period covered by this book, they scarcely realised they had voices. On working women falls the burden of prostitution, and it is as bearers of that burden that they figure mainly in this book. But the slow changes of the years are changing that too. Prostitution is still with us ; but there is reason to hope that the new orientation towards sex will ultimately remove all necessity for what the Victorians were accustomed to call “ the social evil.”

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTORY NOTE . . . . .	vii
<b>CHAPTER</b>	
I. MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT AND HER TIMES . . . . .	I
II. VICTORIAN MARRIAGE . . . . .	18
III. BELOW THE SURFACE . . . . .	31
IV. MARRIAGE: PROPERTY: PROSTITUTION . . . . .	47
V. THE ROAD TO EDUCATION . . . . .	58
VI. NEW FIELDS . . . . .	81
VII. THE ADVENT OF BIRTH CONTROL . . . . .	94
VIII. "QUEEN'S WOMEN" . . . . .	110
IX. MORE LIGHT ON DARK PLACES . . . . .	138
X. MAN'S DWINDLING PROPERTY . . . . .	150
XI. MILITANT DAYS . . . . .	170
XII. WARTIME FREEDOMS . . . . .	190
XIII. POST-WAR ADJUSTMENTS . . . . .	199
XIV. FRUITS OF KNOWLEDGE . . . . .	219
INDEX . . . . .	239



## **TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM**



## CHAPTER I

### MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT AND HER TIMES

“ How can a being be generous who has nothing of its own ?  
or virtuous, who is not free ? ”

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT (1792).

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT is sometimes called the pioneer of the woman’s movement. Rather she was a voice crying in the wilderness, for she made no converts, formed no group. Instead she roused only bitter hostility, at least as strong among the “ intellectual ” women of her day as among the men. Hannah More, the moral writer, who, though unmarried and decidedly strong-minded, considered that “ there is, perhaps, no animal so much indebted to subordination for its good behaviour as woman,” remarked of “ The Vindication of the Rights of Woman,” the book on which Mary’s fame rests, “ I have been pestered to read the Rights of Women, but am invincibly resolved not to do it.” Of the same work, Mrs. Anne Grant, a popular authoress of the period, wrote, “ I consider this work as every way dangerous. First, because the author to considerable powers adds feeling, and I daresay a degree of rectitude of intention. She speaks from conviction on her own

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

part, and has completely imposed on herself before she attempts to mislead others." Horace Walpole described her as a "hyena in petticoats." He had never met the lady—if he had, he would, no doubt, have been as surprised as were some who did to find that she had beauty of an unusual kind, and a very particular feminine charm.

She stood for something not yet born in the minds of Englishwomen—an equality of status and a freedom in sex which were as foreign to the ideas of her women contemporaries as to their men. Moreover, she lived her faith. Her father, shiftless and perpetually impecunious, fell on particularly evil times when Mary was in her late teens. She took a situation as companion, which she relinquished to nurse her mother through her last illness ; then, at the age of twenty-five, she set up as schoolmistress. At that time, as for nearly a hundred years longer, governessing or the keeping of a school was the one direction in which turned the thoughts of a woman with the least pretension to education when she found herself compelled to earn her bread. The results were disastrous : the teacher, ill-educated herself, could impart little to the ignorant minds of her charges. From one generation of English girls to another this heritage of hopeless ignorance was passed on, long after Dr. Arnold had arisen to rescue their brothers from an almost equal depth of ignorance.

The little school failing, Mary took to governessing. The schoolmistress, whatever her difficulties, had at

## MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

least a position of personal independence. The governess had none. Mary's passionate and affectionate nature revolted against the indignities and loneliness of her situation. With her complete lack of obsequiousness and her inability to bend gracefully to circumstances, she was totally unfitted for the post of governess in a private family. This unfortunate person was expected to be and to remain a lady, in order that she might have a refining influence on her charges: consequently she could not consort on easy terms with the servants of the establishment in which she happened to be. But she was, after all, a paid domestic worker, and as such could not be accepted into the family. Mary occupied this thankless post in the Kingsborough family for a year, and then she was dismissed: she had had the misfortune to gain the affection of one of her pupils, a wild Irish girl. The girl's mother, though treating her with scant affection herself, resented that she should turn to a warmer nature for the warmth she needed, and Mary found herself without employment.

But just before she entered Lady Kingsborough's service, Mary had sent a little book entitled "Thoughts on the Education of Daughters" to Johnson, the publisher, who had been struck by its ability. She came to London, met Johnson, and from that time worked almost continuously for him. She read manuscripts submitted to him; she translated, perfecting her French and teaching herself Italian and German for the purpose; she wrote a collection of

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

moral stories for the young ; she contributed regularly to the "Analytical Review" ; she produced her first serious work, "The Vindication of the Rights of Men," a reply to Edmund Burke's "Reflections on the Revolution in France" ; and then she went to Paris for a time. She worked hard and unremittingly. By her literary labours she kept that personal independence she could hardly live without, and managed not only to maintain herself, but also to help her sisters, and to get her brother James into the Navy, and her brother Charles to America.

Sex consciousness would appear to have developed late in her. She does not seem to have had any love affair until she came to London, at the age of twenty-nine, to work for Johnson. Johnson brought her into contact with a number of men in the literary and artistic world, and she became one of a little circle in which she held her own by her wit and charm and ability. It was an odd life for a woman to live at that time, alone in rooms where she received more men than women visitors. But she remained emotionally untouched until she formed an attachment for Fuseli, an artist famous in his day, and went so far as to propose a household *à trois* to his wife. How far this attachment went is not known ; but judging from her writings and from her later life, there can be no doubt that Mary would have felt no shame in becoming his mistress. She did not regard her sex as a thing to barter. Consequently shame did not enter into her feelings about it. At any rate, the attachment,

## MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

whatever its ultimate form, proved unhappy. Hence her expedition to Paris.

She arrived in that city in December, 1792, just before the execution of Louis XVI, whom she saw pass through the streets on his way to trial, and she stayed there, with an interval at Havre, until 1795. It was in Paris that she found the great passion of her life. She met Captain Gilbert Imlay, an American citizen, in the early spring of 1793, and took a dislike to him. She met him again, and gradually he assumed in her mind the attributes of the man she had been longing for. They lived together in Paris and in Havre. A child was born. But Imlay tired of the relationship—Mary was too intense for one of his volatile temperament. Like most men in his position, however, he had not the courage to tell her straightly that he was tired. He went to England, and wrote to her to explain how he could not yet return, how he could not yet have her with him, always for business reasons. She lamented his earnestness in search of a fortune—“it seems to me absurd,” she wrote, “to spend life preparing to live.” But he continued to cast down and to encourage her hopes alternately as before. At last she threatened to make an end of the situation herself, by disappearing from his knowledge with her infant. “I have two or three plans in my head to earn our subsistence,” she wrote; and then, in a mistaken generosity of feeling, he bade her come to him instead of taking the easy opportunity she offered him of severing their connection.

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

She journeyed to London with a heavy heart. There she found that he had taken rooms for her, but did not intend to share them. She found, too, that he had another mistress. He told her (what was probably true) that it was but a passing affair—an affair of the flesh. But it continued to engross him, until Mary, who had suggested to Mrs. Fuseli that she should share the Fuseli home, suggested that, since Imlay could not do without his new love, the three of them should live under the same roof. Mary held the view that a husband, if he and his wife are to be useful members of society, cannot continue to be a lover; and though she had not troubled to tie the conventional knot of marriage, she regarded herself as Imlay's wife. She realised that he had ceased to be the lover. She hoped that he might be brought to take up the part of husband and of father to his child, and in order to stabilise this basic relationship she was willing to accept in her own life an arrangement she had not hesitated to propose when she had entertained a passion for another woman's husband. She was strong enough to be consistent when most women would have failed to be so.

But Imlay had no inclination to make this experiment in living—the suggestion probably shocked him as profoundly as it did Mary's friends and has since shocked her biographers, who, forgetful of the Fuseli episode, explain it away as an aberration due to her over-wrought condition.

Of the painful misery of her state of mind at this

## MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

time there is no doubt. Even her little daughter, of whom she wrote in a letter to Imlay, “she has got into my heart and imagination, and when I walk out without her, her little figure is ever dancing before me,” could not console her or hold back her desire to escape from a wretchedness of heart and mind that seemed too heavy to be borne. She tried to drown herself by throwing herself into the Thames from Putney Bridge; but first she walked up and down in the cold November rain for a long time in order that her clothes might become sodden and pull her under the more certainly. She was rescued, but not until she had gone through all the pain of death by drowning, for she was unconscious when taken from the water by riverside boatmen. Her friends the Christies, at whose house she had first met Imlay, took charge of her and looked after her till she was sufficiently healed in mind and body to take up her life once more. She said afterwards that however hard she might be tempted to suicide again, she would never try to drown herself: the pain of it was too terrible.

Johnson the publisher came to her rescue: he put work in her way again and continued to be her friend as well as her employer. It was shortly after Imlay disappeared from her life that William Godwin, the philosopher and novelist, entered it. They had met on one occasion at Mr. Johnson’s house in 1791, when they had not impressed one another favourably—Godwin wrote of that meeting, “Mary and myself parted mutually displeased with each other.” But

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

now Mary had been through bitter experiences. She had matured ; she was no longer the pushful young woman of their first encounter. The philosopher and the saddened, but not embittered, woman found sympathetic understanding in one another, and before many months were over, they became lovers. Their relationship was private, and might have remained so but that Mary found herself again pregnant. Apparently her heart failed her at this. At any rate, she and Godwin were married on 29th March, 1797, and the ceremony, according to Godwin, took place at Mary's earnest desire. Her second child, at least, was to be born with a legal claim on a father's affection, since the natural claim had counted for so little in the case of her first. It seems more than likely that no legal tie would have bound Imlay to her, and that Godwin would have felt himself as firmly bound without one—after Mary's death he treated Imlay's daughter as his own, and whatever reservations one has as to Godwin's character in later life, his behaviour to his own and his stepchildren was completely and unselfishly devoted.

The marriage had one curious effect on Mary's life : several women, among them Mrs. Inchbald the writer, and Mrs. Siddons the actress, who had been on terms of friendship with her, cut her, because the new tie made it impossible for them any longer to pretend to themselves that she had been married to Imlay—a pretence she never fostered, and indeed always sought to dissipate. The wedded life of Mary and Godwin

## MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

was short, for Mary died with the birth of her second daughter; but while it lasted it was successful. Godwin and Mary had, despite their views, gone through the conventional form of marriage; nevertheless, they maintained the reality of their separate existences. They took a house jointly at the Polygon, Somers Town, into which Mary moved with her elder daughter Fanny; but Godwin also rented rooms nearby, and there he went daily to work and read, and there he sometimes slept. Though married they kept up the little formalities of arranged meetings and separate interests that had characterised their earlier relationship. They made almost a point of not going out as husband and wife, and sometimes avoided appearing together even in circles where they had both moved before their marriage.

The tie was of too short a duration to provide any overwhelming proof of the wisdom of their ways. Mrs. Barbauld, a poet of some contemporary note with views on education, expressed the conviction that the appearance of babies in their family would soon bring them to more conventional habits. But both were strongly individualist, both had lived much to themselves, and one may doubt whether any other way of living would have given these two even six months of conjugal serenity.

There is an irony in the fact that poor Mary, whose storm-tossed life seemed settled into comfortable ways at last, found death too easily when she no longer desired it. Yet perhaps that last year of

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

peace and happiness obliterated the sorrows she had undergone ; and perhaps her early death saved her from an aftermath of disillusion. What Godwin would have grown to be had Mary lived we cannot tell. Without Mary, and with Mary's commonplace successor, he developed into a sorry specimen of the sponging literary man. Yet even in that disintegration one cannot but admire the single-minded devotion with which he, who in his young days had proclaimed his antipathy to the ties of marriage and family, laboured (and sponged) to feed and educate Imlay's daughter and his own, his second wife's daughter and their son—the more so that he never expressed distaste and dissatisfaction with the difficult lot Fate had meted out to him.

What was the world into which Mary Wollstonecraft was untimely born ?

It was a world in which the education of men was indifferent, and of women non-existent ; a world in which all women and most men were without political rights, in which married women and working men had no legal rights. And though the revolution in France severely shook the established order of things in England, it did not shatter it. Divorce was obtainable only by a special act of Parliament for each individual case, and was therefore out of reach of all but the wealthy and influential. A woman's property became her husband's absolutely on marriage ; so did her earnings and any property she might acquire by

## MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

inheritance during the marriage. It was the girl's part to please an eligible man sufficiently to draw him into matrimony. Once made, the bond was practically irrevocable ; and behind the security of that irrevocable bond, strange wrongs were perpetrated. A man could dissipate his wife's fortune and leave her and their children to starve. A woman could make a man's life hell by the intemperance of her tongue or her habits. There was no remedy for either of them. The woman who left her husband, however good the grounds of her separation from him, was looked at askance. "The situation of a woman separated from her husband," wrote Mary Wollstonecraft, "is undoubtedly very different from that of a man who has left his wife. He with lordly dignity, has shaken off a clog ; and the allowing her food and raiment, is thought sufficient to secure his reputation from taint. And, should she have been inconsiderate, he will be celebrated for his generosity and forbearance. . . . A woman, on the contrary, resigning what is termed her natural protector (though he never was so, but in name) is despised and shunned, for asserting the independence of mind distinctive of a rational being, and spurning at slavery."

"Girls ought," said Rousseau, "to be heedful and industrious, and . . . they ought early to be brought under restraint. . . . There results from this habitual restraint a docility which women need during their whole life, since they never cease to be subject either to a man or to the judgement of men. . . . Made to

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

obey a being as imperfect as man, often so full of vices, and always so full of faults, she ought early to learn to suffer even injustice, and to endure the wrongs of a husband without complaint."

To become a wife was to become a cipher. When a woman promised to love, honour, and obey a man, she abandoned all claim to an independent existence, to the exercise of her own will, to any right in the control or education of her children, to any rights in her property, even the most personal : "a wife being as much a man's property as his horse, or his ass, she has nothing she can call her own. He may use any means to get at what the law considers as his, the moment his wife is in possession of it, even to the forcing of a lock, as Mr. Venables did, to search for notes in my writing-desk—and all this is done with a show of equity because, forsooth, he is responsible for her maintenance," is the passionate protest of the wronged wife in Mary's posthumous novel, "The Wrongs of Women."

Yet in a world where the only profitable career open to women was wifehood, women submitted to this indignity of cipherdom in order to secure a competence. Who, indeed, would deliberately have chosen any of the possible alternatives ?

For the middle-class woman who had to earn her bread—and even in those days there were widows without portions, unmarried women without incomes, and deserted wives without provision—the outlook was bleak. She might, and generally did, however

## MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

unfitted for the task, turn to teaching. She might, if she had a talent for it, turn to needlework or painting, and by this means she could earn a few shillings a week. At a moment when it had been suggested that Mary Wollstonecraft and her sister Eliza might live with Fanny Blood, the three of them to earn their livelihood by painting and needlework, Fanny wrote to Everina, another sister of Mary's, "The very utmost I could earn, one week with another, supposing I had uninterrupted health, is half-a-guinea a week [by painting] which would just pay for furnished lodgings for three people to pig together. As for needlework, it is utterly impossible they could earn more than half-a-guinea a week between them, supposing they had constant employment, which is of all things the most uncertain." Such gifts as those that enabled Mary to make her living by literary work were seldom given a chance to develop : Aphra Behn, Susannah Centlivre, and Mary Manley, who succeeded Swift as editor of the "Examiner," were among the very few women who, up to her time, earned money as well as fame by writing.

Otherwise, there was nothing for the portionless girl, unless she took to prostitution, and that was a trade for which few gently-bred women had either taste or talent. For a woman to earn her living was in any case to lose caste ; but to earn it by teaching or genteel needlework still left open the chance of ultimate salvation by marriage. To resort to prostitution, even in its least ugly form, meant a

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

deliberate choice of social outlawry. The existence of the kept woman (unless she were legally married) was ignored by all other women with any pretensions to social standing, however simple. Those men who might frequent her while her youth and freshness lasted did so surreptitiously only.

Marriage, on any terms, seemed better than poverty-ridden spinsterhood ; and after all, a woman had as good a chance then as now of making a satisfactory first choice in the matrimonial lucky-bag. Lord Chesterfield, after condemning the common treatment of matrimony as a topic of “false wit and cold raillery,” adds, “I presume that men and their wives neither love nor hate each other the more, upon account of the form of matrimony which has been said over them. The cohabitation, indeed, which is the consequence of matrimony, makes them either love or hate more, accordingly as they respectively deserve it ; but that would be exactly the same, between any man and woman, who lived together without being married.” The wife who had been chosen by a good husband for something less sordid than her portion, or her efficiency as a housekeeper, did not find his rights press on her unduly. For the incompatible, there was no escape—only death gave a second chance to the surviving partner ; but the compatible found contentment. And in the hope of attaining that blessed state at the earliest possible moment women were taught “from their infancy . . .

## MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, *outward* obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety will obtain for them the protection of man" \* ; that they must be cautious in displaying good sense—"it will be thought you assume a superiority over the rest of the company. But if you happen to have any learning, keep it a profound secret, especially from the men, who generally look with a jealous and malignant eye on a woman of great parts and a cultivated understanding."†

"Gentleness of manner, forbearance and long suffering," "the submissive demeanour of dependence," "docility, and a spaniel-like affection": these were the attributes which Mary Wollstonecraft found were requisite in the wives of her day, and she, with her proud independence of spirit, could stomach none of them. Fanny Burney withdrew a play because of her father's disapproval of her appearance before the public in the character of a playwright, although she was then a married woman and therefore even at that time independent of parental control. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, learned and forceful, declared that she owed any reputation for learning she might have won to "inevitable accident"—"I have always carefully avoided it, and ever thought it a misfortune," and strongly recommended that a girl should hide whatever learning she attained "with as

\* Mary Wollstonecraft, "Vindication of the Rights of Woman."

† Dr. Gregory, "Legacy to His Daughters," quoted "Vindication of the Rights of Woman."

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

much solicitude as she would hide crookedness or lameness." Hannah More held that "that providential economy which has clearly determined that women were born to share with men the duties of private life, has as clearly demonstrated, that they were not born to divide with them its public administration."

"Independence I have long considered as the grand blessing of life, the basis of every virtue—and independence I will ever secure by contracting my wants, though I were to live on a barren heath," proclaimed Mary Wollstonecraft, and she lived up to her conviction. She wished to see women act in society as human beings, to forget their sex "unless where love animated the behaviour." "She set a great value on a mutual affection between persons of an opposite sex," wrote Godwin in his memoir of her. "She regarded it as the principal solace of human life." But she also thought that no motive on earth should keep a man and wife together once mutual love and regard were gone. She considered that women should be educated in a "more orderly manner" in order that they might be fitted to engage in business—"women would not then marry for a support"; that they should study the art of healing and "be physicians as well as nurses, and midwifery decency seems to allot to them"; that they should have "a civil existence in the state, married or single"; that they should have representatives "instead of being arbitrarily governed without having any

## MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

direct share allowed them in the deliberations of government."

She who was regarded askance by her women contemporaries would have found herself at home at last in the world of one hundred and thirty years later.

## CHAPTER II

### VICTORIAN MARRIAGE

“ Let those women who have the true woman’s lot of being unknown out of the circle of their homes thank God for that blessing.”

CAROLINE NORTON (1853).

WHEN the young Victoria ascended the throne, the country was due for one of those periodical swings of the pendulum that oscillates between sexual licence and sexual restraint. Licence had had its innings, under the patronage of George IV., both as Regent and as King. William IV. in his brief reign had set a different fashion. Not that Society was much inclined to be influenced by the Sailor King ; but with his lesser subjects he was popular, and his simpler ways heralded the change. The sudden appearance of an innocent girl on the throne that had for so many years been occupied by stale and far from innocent men filled people’s minds with a picture of the charms of youthful purity and virginal sweetness. The young Queen’s girlhood was idolised and idealised, and the simple phrase she was reputed to have used when the news of her accession was announced to her—“ I will be good ”—only served to emphasise her youth

## VICTORIAN MARRIAGE

and innocence. In her accession, her subjects received by proxy a sort of baptism of purification.

The character of Victoria's own marriage helped to consolidate and perpetuate this tendency. "Her Majesty's expression of the words 'love, cherish, and obey'—the confiding look with which they were accompanied—were inimitably chaste and beautiful," reported the Annual Register in its account of the actual marriage ceremony. By a curious fluke of fate, the gay, self-willed young niece of the gay, self-willed Regent met in her unemotional, duty-ridden cousin Albert a man who, while he tamed her vivacity, yet inspired in her a devoted loyalty and love that outlasted his death by all the long years of her widowhood. The lonely and isolated young girl had a need for an object to adore: only the husband she had to choose, of all the multitudes around her, could come close to her, could be a companion to her. Royalty, like riches, has innumerable acquaintances, but no friends, unless the partner selected in marriage is friend as well as spouse. Victoria, young and inexperienced, by great good luck chose for her husband a man who was capable of complete self-abnegation in the pursuit of what he felt was his duty. His marriage itself was in the nature of a duty; but he brought to it a devotion to Victoria's interests and those of her country that made him indeed her friend, and, though this she had not anticipated, her lifelong guide. The resulting marriage was a relationship full of affection, full of dignified conjugal love, blessed with many children;

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

a relationship devoid of passion (unless Victoria's adoration of her spouse's goodness supplied that lack). In fact, it was the sort of marriage that formed the ideal middle-class conception of the relationship during the rest of the century. In that ideal, it was fitting that the wife should be the adorer, the husband the adored. The home was the standard social unit, the husband its unquestioned head. "The marriage contract," wrote James Fitzjames Stephen, Q.C., afterwards a judge of the high court, in a typical Victorian pronouncement on the subject, "is one which involves subordination and obedience on the part of the weaker party to the stronger. The proof of this is, to my mind, as clear as that of a proposition in Euclid, and it is this :—1. Marriage is a contract, one of the principal objects of which is the government of a family. 2. This government must be vested either by law or by contract in the hands of one of the two married persons. 3. If the arrangement is made by contract, the remedy for breach of it must either be by law or by a dissolution of the partnership at the will of the contracting parties. 4. Law could give no remedy in such a case. Therefore the only remedy for breach of the contract would be a dissolution of the marriage. 5. Therefore, if marriage is to be permanent, the government of the family must be put by law and by morals in the hands of the husband, for no one proposes to give it to the wife."

Within the bounds of marriage, the husband

## VICTORIAN MARRIAGE

expected to find security, steady affection, and a wife who dutifully supplied his sexual needs, preferably without realising that she had any herself. For the majority of fruitful Victorian wives, the only joy they derived from sex was in their children. The act of union which produced these (often undesired) additions to the family was distasteful to them, for a number of sound psychological reasons. A Victorian maiden was hustled into matrimony at the earliest possible moment—otherwise she might develop into that awful figure, an old maid ; and women were old maids then at an age when they are still regarded as little more than girls to-day. On her wedding night, the ignorant bride was initiated into the mysteries of marriage with no more preparation from her mother than the stern injunction that she must allow her husband to do anything he wanted ; and the man initiating her, in the great majority of cases, felt not only that he was performing an act shameful to his wife, but shameful to himself too, an act for which he had had no more training than she—unless, indeed, he had lived a “fast” life and spent his money on hired women, whose views on the sex act were unlikely to be particularly elevated, and whose performance of it was likely to differ profoundly from that of his bride.

Victorian domestic felicity was erected on a basis of sexual ignorance so complete that its victims had no realisation of the source of their spiritual malaise. An old maid, even one who had wealth of her own,

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

was a rudderless creature. Without education, trained simply for the purpose of interesting some male while her dewy youth was upon her, she had no resources within herself to make her a valued member of any circle. So long as she retained the least trace of youth, she could not associate with men, since that would have ruined her reputation, and swept away any lingering chance of matrimony that remained to her. Her youth gone and her mission in life unfulfilled, she knew herself for a failure: and failures are of interest to none. The lucky spinsters found an outlet for starved energies and affections in ministering to sick relations and indulging nephews and nieces. The unlucky ones sank into a crotchety middle-age and a miserable old age, unloved and unwanted by any, and with no resources of mind or will to colour their dreary lives.

With the awful examples of spinster aunts or aging sisters before them, it was but natural that the majority of young girls should plunge into matrimony at the earliest opportunity that offered. They had no alternative if they wanted to make an acceptable place for themselves in society. Jane Austen explains succinctly why Miss Bates "stood in the very worst predicament in the world for having much of the public favour"—she was "neither young, handsome, rich, nor married." Marriage was the only remunerative, the only truly respectable career open to women, and any marriage was better than none.

Some women are born to matrimony, and these will

## VICTORIAN MARRIAGE

make a success of it in any circumstances. Others—probably the majority of women—are able to adapt their desires to their possessions and can thus snatch success of a sober kind from failure. Having sold their virginity and their accomplishments for the best price these would fetch, Victorian women of this type stuck to their bargains without complaint, whatever their secret repinings may have been. But numbers of women are both unfitted for conventional marriage, and unable to adapt themselves to its requirements. These unfortunates in the nineteenth century had a hopeless life, whether they married or remained single. There was no place for them anywhere, and the tale of wasted energies and fruitless aspirations that, could they rise from their forgotten graves, they could tell, chills the imagination. The “accomplishments” girls were taught to enhance the value of their youthful charms in the matrimonial market were useless to occupy and exercise their minds, and were generally abandoned once they had entered the portals of matrimony—or resigned themselves to spinsterhood. Of what solace were the drawing and water-colour painting to one who had no aptitude for art? Of what use the aching hours of piano practice or vocal scales to one who had no natural gift for music? Yet every contemporary novel of Victorian life makes it clear that the young woman who had no “accomplishments” was regarded as a very poor commodity in the marriage market; and the young person who could draw, however

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

feeble, or play, however mechanically, or sing, however unmelodiously, was regarded—even apparently by her suitors, and certainly by her suitors' womenfolk—as a more desirable *parti* than one who could not.

“I don’t much fancy men often understand women ; they don’t know how restless and weary they get,” wrote Anne Jemima Clough in her diary when she was twenty-nine. There is the same strain of melancholy fretting in Florence Nightingale’s early diaries. Both these women found ultimately an adequate outlet for their wasting energies, though Miss Clough was nearly fifty before she was called to take charge of the Cambridge boarding-house for women students that developed into Newnham ; and Florence Nightingale was thirty-four when she set out for the Crimea. They were the exceptions ; and the picture Mrs. Gaskell draws in her novel “Wives and Daughters” of a wife, comfortably circumstanced, with a husband hearty and affectionate but completely insensitive to her literary and artistic tastes and her longing for the company of persons of similar tastes, strikes a note of psychological insight considerably in advance of her time : “Deprived of all her strong interests, she sank into ill-health ; nothing definite ; only she never was well. . . . She had not been able for many years to walk beyond her garden ; the greater part of her life was spent on a sofa.” Even bridge, that last refuge of the aimless woman of to-day, is a better alternative than the “pretty” invalidism into which so many

## VICTORIAN MARRIAGE

Victorian wives fell, through lack of all mental and physical activities ; and also, perhaps, as the only means of self-protection against the sexual demands of their husbands and the consequent repeated pregnancies. Not that genuine ill-health was always enough to save them, if we are to believe Samuel Butler, whose “Way of all Flesh” is generally regarded as very much of an autobiographical novel. Caroline Pontifex was ill for months after the birth of Ernest, the hero of the story, but she produced her second-born within a year, and her third within another. By that time, one supposes, desire had died in Theobald. Or perhaps the rapid succession of pregnancies and parturitions had so exhausted Caroline, who was thirty-four when she married, that she was incapable of further procreation.

The number of characters in Victorian fiction—sometimes meant to be touching, sometimes not (but always tiresome viewed from the standpoint of to-day) who could not put a foot to the ground for weakness, and yet had no actual disease is amazing. To most Victorian women, this type of invalidism appeared not merely interesting, but attractive : it was almost the only way in which they could attract attention to themselves, while remaining models of propriety, in a world indifferent to their potential intellectual or athletic endowments ; and the fancies of young girls who would nowadays see themselves pleading at the bar or playing championship tennis at Wimbledon, dwelt then on pictures of themselves as pathetically

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

helpless creatures in the grip of lingering (but not painful) illness, and the objects of the constant concern of their doting families.

“ Few ladies would like to be told that they were disobedient wives,” remarks James Fitzjames Stephen, Q.C., complacently in the work already quoted ; and he was right. Far from resenting their chains, the majority of Victorian wives accepted them without question—even gloried in them. Emma, friend of “ Diana of the Crossways ” and a typically sweet invalid of the period, expressed an almost universal sentiment among her women contemporaries when she remarked : “ The rules of Christian Society are a blessed government for us women. We owe it so much that there is not a brick of the fabric we should not prop.” That was the attitude of probably nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand Victorian women—the attitude against which the pioneers working for the freeing of women (and thereby of men) seemed to beat in vain. How can one release the prisoner who hugs her chains, who prefers the security of a prison wall within which, though she has no freedom of movement, she has the right to food and shelter, and gets both in a highly satisfactory degree if her gaoler is comfortably circumstanced and easy-going ? Certainly one could not expect the average female born in the first half of last century, and brought up to be pleasing and obedient to some—to any eligible—male to develop a sense of hardy independence, to gain the knowledge

## VICTORIAN MARRIAGE

that for true usefulness in the world, as well as for ultimate self-realisation, one must be self-sufficient. It was against all the habits and customs of the age that a woman should be self-sufficient, should realise herself ; and the vast majority will always conform to the custom of the day, whether it be rigid monogamy or free love, dress or nudity.

“ The wild and stupid theories advanced by a few women of ‘ equal rights ’ and ‘ equal intelligence ’ are not the opinions of their sex. I, for one (I, with millions more), believe in the natural superiority of man, as I do in the existence of God. The natural position of woman is inferiority to man,” wrote Caroline Norton in 1838. A woman of parts who failed to make a lucky selection in her first matrimonial venture, she yet regarded herself as inferior to the very inferior being whom she had elected to rule her destiny and against whom for many years she waged a bitter fight for the right of access to her children at a time when children were as much the father’s property as was his wife. Fifty years later, the author of a book on “ Marriage and Divorce ” signing himself Ap Richard, who included some admirable sentiments of freedom, for men, among his unorthodox pronouncements, maintained the same essential difference in the status of a man and his wife : “ There is,” he writes, “ in the present day, a disposition in some quarters to elevate the position of women, not only in the way of education and political privileges, but even to put the wife on a level with her husband, and

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

to ignore the old-fashioned principles of marital authority. Such a movement, we venture to predict, can never permanently succeed. It is against nature, against universal history, against the true well-being and happiness of married life."

The Rev. F. D. Maurice, reformer and practical idealist, strikes a refreshingly unusual note when, in a letter to Georgina Hare, who became his second wife, he writes, "I conceive much of the alienation and bitterness which one reads of in the stories of married life, and of which one sees far more than in books . . . arise in a great measure from the incapacity of the husband to recognise the earlier habits and tendencies of her mind, and his determination that she shall be cast, whether she will or not, into his mould." He meant the same thing, no doubt, as Mrs. Norton when she pleaded with a prospective bridegroom to "remember that the most intelligent woman God ever made has something of the child in her disposition, and that the indulgence shown to children is as necessary in their case (if you mean either to be happy) as with an infant of three years old," though Mrs. Norton's essentially "feminine" form of appeal would have nauseated Maurice, the pioneer of ordered education for women. Consideration or indulgence, as one cares to regard it, by the husband of the wife's tastes, feelings, prejudices, and sentiments was rare enough, however; hers was the part of adjustment and self-restraint. Not that the inelasticity of men's attitude to the women they married helped them to

## VICTORIAN MARRIAGE

happiness either. The secret unexpressed antagonisms of a close relationship in which there was no intimacy of mind were as destructive of the man's peace and happiness as of the woman's. Small wonder that Jane Austen's Emma felt she would never be able to call her husband by any more intimate name than "Mr. Knightley." (My own great-grandmother to the day of her death always called her husband by his surname.) Small wonder, too, that Theodore Pontifex, riding towards his bridal night beside a woman he realised he scarcely knew, was filled with foreboding for his future. He thought that by cowing his bride into instant submission over the ordering of dinner, he was paving the way to a satisfactory marriage. He was taking the path that seemed to promise absence of domestic friction, and in a majority of cases fulfilled its promise; but he was, in fact, shutting himself out from any possibility of achieving intimacy with the partner he had irrevocably taken to share his life.

The unhappy marriages of nineteenth-century fiction, however, had one immense advantage over those of real life: their author could always put an end to them by death, and thus prepare the way for a new bridal bed, since wedding bells were the inevitable end in those days of every novel. Death, violent or lingering, played a busy part in romances of marital unhappiness, always conveniently taking the undeserving and leaving the way open for the union of the deserving survivor with his or her true soul-mate.

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

From Charlotte Brontë to Mrs. Henry Wood and George Meredith the recipe is the same: Rochester's mad wife meets a horrible death by fire; Mrs. Elster dies lingeringly of one of those nameless, mysterious diseases common among Victorian female characters; Diana's disagreeable husband is killed in a street accident. Selfless and devoted love is in each case suitably rewarded by alliance at long last with the object of its unobtrusive desire. Caroline Norton, on whose unhappy life "*Diana of the Crossways*" is sometimes held to have been based, was less fortunate: she separated from her husband when she was twenty-eight, and lived on, neither wife, maid nor widow (save that she was still a wife in the eyes of the law) until her sixty-seventh year before death released her and she was able to marry her old admirer Sir William Stirling-Maxwell.

## CHAPTER III

### BELOW THE SURFACE

“ There is one ghastly investigation still waiting on the economist. It is the aid to wages which is got from ‘ the oldest trade in the world.’ ”

WILLIAM SMART (1895).

PROSTITUTION may well be the oldest profession ; but during the nineteenth century it assumed dimensions in England far surpassing anything known before in that country. “ Illicit ” intercourse between the sexes is a commonplace of agricultural life : but if pregnancy occurs, it usually leads to a hasty marriage between the prospective mother and the probable father. In few cases does a money consideration enter into the matter. Passion is the ruling motive. Curiosity, so often the predominating urge in early urban sexual experience, plays little part, since the elemental facts of copulation and birth are familiar to country-bred children from their infancy.

London and other big cities had boasted their prostitutes since they had ceased to be villages, from the slut who frequented low drinking-houses, where soldiers and sailors might be met, to the courtesan who could count kings and princes among her clients.

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

But the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth was a time of freedom in manners ; and freedom of manners is the greatest brake on prostitution : in any age when the women of the world are not averse to bestowing their favours upon their male acquaintance, prostitution becomes less profitable, and is thereby decreased. “ I should have thought that Lord Huntingdon,” wrote Lord Chesterfield to his son, “ . . . need not have been reduced to keep an opera w——e, in such a place as Paris, where so many women of fashion generously serve as volunteers.”

With the industrial revolution, however, came also a change in manners ; and the two phenomena worked together for the increase of prostitution. Prostitution springs up in the first place wherever there is a shifting population of men separated from their homes—particularly in towns where sailors and soldiers and other chance passers congregate. Once established, of course, the resident male may take advantage of it : but it is not for him that it comes into being, since he has less urgent need of it. The tremendous activity that went on during last century in the construction of canals, bridges and railways, and the building and improvement of roads, the best of which had hitherto been little better than cart tracks, kept a large body of rootless men earning good wages continuously moving about the country ; and in their tracks followed venereal disease. Many a country district in England that, until the railway struck across it, was as innocent

## BELOW THE SURFACE

of venereal disease as were the South Sea Islands before white men took it there, is now, like those poisoned islands, rotten with it. The increased strength of the regular army, the vast increase in the number of men employed in the navy and in the merchant service who were deposited at intervals to roam in some fresh port with money in their pockets and no normal social ties to hold them, the immense army of commercial travellers that sprang up during the nineteenth century, provided huge reserves of roving, female-hungry men in whose service was recruited a growing army of purchasable women. And the women were found readily enough among the slaves of the new industrial order.

The Hammonds remark, in their account of "The Town Labourer" from 1760 to 1832, that the new industrial system was raised on the basis of a family wage earned by the wife and children as well as the man. The result was a lowering of the man's wage (investigation shows that in areas where the women and children worked the total wages of a family were substantially the same as those earned by a man in areas where the women and children did not work) and the fixing of a still more painfully low level of wages for women, in the payment of which no account was taken of whether the woman was, in fact, one member of a family wage-earning group, or entirely self-supporting.

From this idea, that a woman is a merely contributory member to the family income, and not a

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

self-supporting individual, springs the still usual practice of paying women less than men for the same work ; and that again springs from the bad old days when a married woman was a nonentity, and all she had or earned belonged without quibble or question to her husband. The theory of payment according to dependants is one that can be argued ; but it is never applied in any logical way by those who accept it in reference to women. A woman, they argue, is normally dependent, or at most merely self-dependent ; a man is normally a husband and the father of a family for whose support he is legally responsible ; therefore, a man should be paid at a higher rate than a woman. No account is taken of the numerous men who have no dependants, of the numerous women who have several—and few wage-earning women over thirty are without them.

The pernicious practice of different rates of pay for men and women engaged on the same work struck deep roots throughout industry—so deep that in many industries women's pay was reckoned on an actual percentage basis of men's. For instance, women employed in the printing trade in Perth during the 'seventies put in a bill at the end of each week worked out on the men's scale ; the cashier divided by two and paid the resulting amount. In the woollen industry, the same principle held, women's wages in some of the processes being actually one-third of the men's, despite the women's equal speed and skill. Throughout industry, except in the cotton trade where the women

## BELOW THE SURFACE

were well organised, and also for the most part worked on different processes from the men, this arbitrary payment of lower rates to women, because they were women, prevailed.

Working-men trade unionists were slow to grasp the fact (have they grasped it yet ?) that the one way to guard whatever privileges of working conditions and wages they had won was by insisting that women should receive the same rates of pay as men : employers, not being dispensers of charity, would in that case employ only those men and women most competent to fulfil the needs of industry, and women would never be substituted for men, irrespective of their actual merit, merely because they are cheaper. Under-cutting by women, for which they have so often and so bitterly been reviled by men, could not exist. Once women had gained access to the law and to medicine, the trade unionists in those professions, wiser than their working-class brethren, insisted that women must charge the same scale of fees as men if they wished to be allowed to practise.

During the nineteenth century the average of wages was exceedingly low ; but while that of men was about 18s. a week, that of women was about 10s., and of the women in employment, thousands earned less than that—down to the three or four shillings a week that still obtained in some of the Birmingham metal trades at the passing of the first Trade Boards Act in 1909. During the 'eighties, philanthropic investigators estimated that a single girl maintaining herself

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

independently of her family could keep herself respectable (*i.e.*, was not compelled to resort to at least intermittent prostitution) on ten shillings a week. Girls living away from their families and earning less almost without exception eked out their earnings by a certain amount of surreptitious prostitution. Nor can we pride ourselves that our century does better, for Sidney Webb estimated before the war that the average earnings of women employed in industry were 10s. 10½d. a week, against a man's 25s. 9d. The kind of treatment that reduced women's average earnings to such a level, and forced many an unwilling woman into prostitution, is significantly set forth in a book published in 1906 dealing with the results of fairly extensive investigations into women's work and wages. It reports the following conversation between some factory girls and a lady visitor at one of their clubs. "We're rather rough, Miss," remarks one of the girls, "and don't rightly know how to speak to a lady." "Never mind," was the answer, "we can all get on together so long as we keep ourselves respectable." "Well, Miss, we all mean to, but when work's short the master puts us on piece work instead of day work, and we don't know and come short at the end of the week. These things make a girl lose heart and then she doesn't care what becomes of her. You should see some of the girls cry pay-day."

The Hammonds relate that during a strike in the Midlands about 1800, "a notorious sweater of women" was asked whether he did not think that

## BELOW THE SURFACE

“wages of half a crown a week would necessarily drive women to prostitution.” In 1834 the London Union of Journeymen Bookbinders wrote to the British and Foreign Bible Society: “Your memorialists beg leave to state that there are a number of females (about two hundred) employed in binding the books of your Society the whole of whose wages have been reduced in consequence of the late alteration in the price of these books. Their wages before were very low. Your memorialists respectfully submit that the making it more difficult and in some cases impossible for females to earn an honest subsistence by their labour, is in the same proportion to give potency to the seducers of female virtue.” The Bible Society asserted that “competent and industrious women earned 8s. to 10s. a week and upwards” (men “in the same description” were earning 30s. a week); but the secretary of the union declared that a large proportion of the women earned at most 5s. 11d. a week.

One way out for the unattached girl or woman whose wages were permanently or temporarily so hopelessly low that she could not pay even her normally modest way was to get out of the payment of rent by persuading a man of her own class to take a bed for the two of them in some house where no interest was taken in the matrimonial condition of the couple wanting accommodation. Fifty years ago, cheap lodging-houses for couples, known as “the doubles,” catered especially for this sort of trade.

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

For the girl with some looks and freshness, and the gift of presenting her poor clothes well, there was, of course, always the possibility of making up her wage deficiency more effectually in the company of some man in a better walk of life. But on the whole, prostitution among factory workers was among their own class, and intermittent. Factories tend to congregate in particular towns and particular areas—did so even more last century, when they were being feverishly built, and were directly dependent on coal for power, than they do to-day when they are often only indirectly dependent on coal in the easily conveyed form of electricity. Round the factories lived the workers, and perhaps their overseers. All others fled the vicinity. Consequently the factory girl had little opportunity of meeting men in whose company prostitution might be a really paying means of livelihood. Domestic servants, governesses, shop-assistants, dressmakers and milliners, waitresses and barmaids, whose normal occupations took them into superior residential districts and brought them continually into contact with moneyed men, found it easier to slip into profitable prostitution. Their conditions of service and their wages were little if at all better than those of the factory hand; their legitimate employments were in any case parasitic and did not tend to promote the sturdy independence of character common among factory and mill girls. Moreover, though poor and shut out from the luxuries and enjoyments of life, they came constantly in touch

## BELOW THE SURFACE

with them, were continually ministering to the luxuries and enjoyments of others. The factory girl had no opportunity of observing the softnesses of life, no contact with its luxuries. When driven to it, by bitter lack of money, she would use her body to get herself a night's lodging. Or she would use it in an endeavour to obtain security or improvement of employment—for in most factories the girls were under a foreman or male “overlooker” against whose despotism they had no protection. She had little chance of providing herself with more by her sex, and did not, therefore, fall into regular prostitution with the same ease as did her sister workers in domestic employments.

Of some eleven thousand prostitutes who served terms of imprisonment in Millbank during the 'eighties for various offences, half had been in domestic service, while only one-tenth came from factories. The peculiar friendlessness of the domestic servant's existence had a good deal to do with her propensity for prostitution. The average housewife of last century regarded her servant as of a different clay, and did everything possible to emphasise that supposed difference. Even the good employer habitually provided her maids with poorer quality food than that of the family, put them to live in dark basements and to sleep in uncomfortable attics, freezing cold in winter, stifling hot in summer. The girl who worked near her home could recover her humanity there on her rare holidays ; but a large proportion of the servants

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

of the metropolis—often scarcely in their teens when they began their careers—were drawn from the country. Far from all familiar things, isolated in alien and frequently unfriendly surroundings, they readily fell into the “sin” of sexual love. But they found to their cost that town ethics usually differed materially from those of the country on this matter. The probable pregnancy was the signal, not for marriage, but for disgrace. Thomas Hardy knew his reading public when he made Tess’s fall, not a succumbing to her own sex hunger, but a violation of her unconscious body. Even so, he could not quite make the Victorians swallow the epithet “pure” in relation to her—did she not afterwards go back voluntarily, though under duress of circumstance, to the arms of her seducer: and that when she had sworn her bridal vows to another? I remember my grandmother solemnly and with pursed lips pronouncing that she could forgive her her first fault: but not her second. No sort of censure was passed on the man who had vowed to cherish her, and instead left her to her fate.

Abandoned by her lover, whether of her own class or of that which she served, hounded by a self-righteous employer without notice or pay from the only shelter she had, the servant girl who had given way to the natural craving for human affection and human warmth found herself without home or hope, and almost inevitably dropped into prostitution. The stupid reached prison sooner or later; the clever sometimes did well for themselves.

## BELOW THE SURFACE

Mary Wollstonecraft offers a curious sidelight on prostitution in her novel, "The Wrongs of Woman." One of the characters appears in the story (and a poor story it is) as a sort of gaoler in a bogus madhouse where the heroine is confined by her villainous husband. At an earlier period of her life she had been the mistress of a man of taste and wealth. Not being his wife, she was treated by her lover and his men friends with the utmost freedom, and as a consequence she gained, as well as an insight into the grosser sides of masculine speech and manners, an acquaintance with the intellectual pursuits and thoughts of men that would have been denied her for ever had she been a chaste maiden and wife. Undoubtedly the woman who was intelligent enough to be a successful prostitute gained a liberal education of a kind denied to all well-conducted women. But she was an outcast from society, and the death or desertion of her protector, her own increasing years and waning attractions, or the onset of disease meant sooner or later an inevitable descent in the scale of her profession: a fate she occasionally escaped if she had been clever enough to save in times of prosperity and could buy respectability with a husband.

One of the witnesses who gave evidence before the Select Committee on the Contagious Diseases Acts which sat in 1867-8 put the attractive side of the trade when he said, "you must bear in mind that as long as a woman can have, in London, her brougham and servant, and everything else, she is the envy of her

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

sister, who is a sempstress, perhaps. . . . As long as a prostitute is a first-class prostitute, it is an enviable position in the eyes of many others." And the clever ones always hoped to become and to remain first-class. Before another Select Committee, on the law relating to the protection of young girls, held some fourteen years later, the Superintendent of the St. James's district put the matter even more concretely. Speaking of the extraordinary increase in child prostitution in his area, he remarked that these children, of between twelve and fifteen, were generally servants, who would appear on the streets one day in their drab garments of service and a few days later in silks and satins. One such child with whom he had talked he described as dressed in "high boots buttoned half-way up her legs ; she had very short petticoats, her hair was down her back, and she wore a tight-fitting polonaise. . . . She had her fingers covered with rings ; a child of that age—I should say not above thirteen." She had, too, he learned, a "man" of her own—a lad not much older than herself—whom her earnings at least helped to keep.

But while it was true that a girl in the profession would earn far more than in service, she did not reap anything like the full benefit of her earnings. Money easily come by is in any case readily parted with ; and all with whom the known prostitute, street-walker or not, had dealings combined to swindle her and over-charge her. "The London street-walker pays three guineas in rental where an honest family pays one,"

## BELOW THE SURFACE

says Flexner,\* and she often had to remember the policeman on the beat past her door. An outcast, and made to feel one by the attitude towards her of every man and every woman with whom she came in contact, unless the woman were of her own caste, she lived on sufferance, and could offer no resistance to the general conspiracy among the righteous to defraud her.

It was commonly said that the life of a prostitute was short—about five years on the average. But though few women frequented the streets for any great length of time, they did not die literally—they returned to ordinary social life. “Prostitutes disappear rather than die . . .” states Flexner, “only a part . . . remain prostitutes: a small fraction marry, a much larger fraction return to work; those who stick to the business wind up as the servants of younger prostitutes, occasionally as brothel-keepers; a few of them are found as aged hags, offering themselves for a copper coin . . . in the dark corners of Whitechapel.” Between the years 1871 to 1896, thirty-three per cent. of the registered prostitutes of Copenhagen were removed from the register by marriage and by returning to their friends. During the years 1888 to 1903, an average of over five thousand women were entered yearly on the prostitution registers of Paris. The average annual deaths among registered women were nineteen. Since the women who found their way on to the register were drawn from the

\* “Prostitution in Europe.”

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

lowest elements in the profession, one would assume that they were likely to have the lowest resistance to disease. The death rate among the registered being so low, that among the far larger army of the unregistered was in all probability far lower.

But disease, nevertheless, was the bane of the prostitute's life. Street-walker or discreet dressmaker, she rarely escaped it. Some authorities asserted that every prostitute was diseased within a year; others, more conservatively, that every woman became diseased sooner or later. One terrible aspect of venereal disease among prostitutes is opened up by Flexner, who reports an investigation showing that fully fifty per cent. of prostitutes under eighteen were venereally infected; while of the cases of syphilis described by other authorities nearly forty per cent. were children between twelve and seventeen. This suggests that many girls were infected before they took to prostitution; that the "fall" that precipitated them into it was due to what the Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases (1914-1916) called "the abominable superstition" that a man can rid himself of venereal disease by intercourse with a virgin—a superstition that still persists among the ignorant, and accounts for a large proportion of child violations.

Many diseased women did not know they were affected; and of those who were at last driven by pain to seek medical assistance, many took their condition philosophically. Accustomed as they were to occupational diseases—lead poisoning and its sequels of

## BELOW THE SURFACE

dropped wrist and worse, the tremors characteristic of mirror-makers, due to the absorption of mercury into their systems, the necrosis of the jaw that afflicted matchmakers as a result of phosphorus poisoning, the mental derangements due to inhalation by rubber workers of the fumes of bisulphide of carbon, miners' phthisis, and the rest—they looked upon venereal disease as itself an occupational disease, and took little account of it, partly from carelessness, partly because, if they were engaged wholly in prostitution, they would starve if they desisted from their occupation ; if engaged as shop-assistants, dress-makers, or barmaids, they would lose the positions which gave them a superior standing in the pursuit of their second trade—and would again starve. Berkeley Hill, M.B., who gave evidence before the Select Committee on the Contagious Diseases Act already referred to, said of a woman whom he met waiting for custom in a court in Gray's Inn Lane while she was an out-patient of his, “she had been in the habit of receiving perhaps as many as ten men in one week ; sometimes, perhaps, not so many. It depended a good deal upon her earnings ; if she had a good sum given to her, she would refrain for a few days until the money was spent, and then go on the streets again. I only narrate that as an instance of the practice of nearly every one of the lower class of prostitutes ; they are obliged to continue this kind of life simply because if they do not they starve.”

Bernard Shaw makes Mrs. Warren say, when she

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

is trying to persuade her daughter to understand how she came to take up a life of prostitution, "I was more afraid of the whitelead factory than I was of the river," in which righteous folk had assured her she would end. He might have made her add, "or of venereal disease," for the lead worker never escaped; the prostitute could hope that she would.

## CHAPTER IV

### MARRIAGE : PROPERTY : PROSTITUTION

“ There is a certain dignity to be kept up in pleasures, as well as in business. In love, a man may lose his heart with dignity ; but if he loses his nose, he loses his character into the bargain.”

CHESTERFIELD (1750).

INDISSOLUBLE marriage with women of undefiled chastity was essential to the Victorian scheme of things. The prosperity that attended on the new industrial era brought property to thousands of families formerly possessed of nothing. In Lancashire, for instance, handloom weavers, small farmers, labouring men started cotton factories in their dozens, and within a generation their families had leapt securely into comfortable middle-class life from a hand-to-mouth rural existence. In the second generation, grown wealthy, the sons were sent to public schools, the daughters brought up to idleness. The same kind of thing happened all over the country ; and the Reform Act of 1832 changed England from a land where the aristocracy and the landed gentry controlled the country’s fortunes to one where a recently developed and rapidly increasing middle-class played the principal rôle in legislation and administration.

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

The new property was not like the old. It did not consist in land, though the successful industrialist, as he grew more self-assured, made a practice of buying out the impoverished squire before whom his fathers had cringed for generations, retaining the old house and a certain amount of land, "developing" the rest of it for industrial purposes. With the home of those he had formerly regarded as his betters, he tended to acquire their manners, and the traditions of the rights and duties of property that they had nurtured and handed down from one generation to another. Such land as he acquired, he regarded as a plaything. He did not cultivate his acres ; he turned them into parks and gardens. Not so was his attitude to the things in which his real wealth consisted—factories and shares and interest-bearing securities ; forms of property far more malleable than the old, but, in a changing age, all the more valuable for that. His possessions could be juggled with and increased a hundredfold in the lifetime of one holder. So natural did this process of expansion come to appear that it was reflected in the rapidity with which the birth rate rose. If a father could count with fair certainty on a continual increase in his possessions, it is not to be wondered at that he felt he could provide for all comers to the domestic nest. But, no less than the owner of landed estates, he wanted no bastards in that nest. He wanted in his turn to found a family, to see his eldest son succeed him in his factory or workshop, and a grandson ready to succeed him ; to

## MARRIAGE : PROPERTY : PROSTITUTION

establish a new order of industrial aristocracy taking over the ideas on inheritance of the now dying landed aristocracy. To ensure this, he wanted to be quite certain that the children borne by his wife were the fruit of his own loins, and such is the power of suggestion, in all but rare cases he could.

Women to whom sex experience came, as a rule, too early in a form that was clumsy and shamefaced, and brought inevitably in its train a succession of births from which none of the pains were banished by a merciful anaesthesia were not likely to go in for experiments in sex experience. Meredith's Diana Warwick is a typical presentation of the woman of the period. He declares her passionate, and in love. Yet, for the sake of a reputation she has lost through her husband's false accusations, she will not yield to the man she loves. Sex was to the Victorian wife a disagreeable necessity, an unconquered animal taste in her husband to which she was compelled to submit by the terms of her marriage vows. The astonishing thing is that Victorian bridegrooms could bring themselves to repeat that curiously erotic phrase in the Church of England marriage service : "With my body I thee worship"—and that their brides could bear to hear it. It seems to have strayed into the cold chasteness of a Christian prayer book from some warm-blooded phallic religion. A man who regarded himself as defiling the body of his bride by the performance of the sex act (and that was the orthodox attitude of mind to bring to the marriage night during

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

the greater part of last century) was surely imperilling the immortal soul he believed himself to possess by committing the blasphemy of asserting such a patent untruth before the altar of the God he professed to revere.

He left that altar owner of the woman at his side, over whose destiny he had, in law, complete control. "A man's profession," remarks Alethea Pontifex in "*The Way of All Flesh*," "is not like his wife, which he must take once for all, for better for worse, without proof beforehand." What a sensation of horror that last phrase would have created in the minds of its readers had it been published when it was written! Yet the old Scottish custom of hand-fasting, by which a couple tried matrimony for a year, and if it agreed with them married, if it disagreed, separated, must have saved those who practised it from many disastrous unions. Indissolubly married to her husband, the wife found that the better her will had been broken to obedience before marriage (unless she had the gift of dissembling to a surpassing degree), the better she was likely to fit into the new niche she had secured for herself. For in the last resort, even the best and most understanding Victorian husband did expect and exact obedience. Anne Brontë's Mrs. Huntingdon, when she locked the door of the conjugal bedroom against her husband as an expression of her displeasure, behaved altogether out of the Victorian picture. Such an idea should never have crossed her mind: though she would have incurred little censure, would indeed

## MARRIAGE : PROPERTY : PROSTITUTION

have been acting within her rights if she had admitted him to the room—and made night hideous for him by an interminable recital of his sins.

John Stuart Mill, drawing up in 1851 the extraordinary document he signed before his marriage, was at least fifty years in advance of the feeling of his time when, “having no means of legally divesting himself” of the “odious powers” conferred on him by marriage he declared it to be his will and intention that his future wife “retains in all respects whatever the same absolute freedom . . . as if no such marriage had taken place ; and I absolutely disclaim and repudiate all pretence to have acquired any *rights* whatever by virtue of such marriage.” In the diary that he kept for a few months in 1854, Mill draws an interesting comparison between the excited condemnation of nunneries then agitating a large part of the English public and that same public’s attitude to marriage : “The fanatical part of the English are just now very urgent for a parliamentary enquiry concerning nunneries, to ascertain whether young women are not detained in them against their will ; and there have been in two successive Sessions majorities in the House of Commons against the Ministers for setting on foot this enquiry. Every word they say that has the least semblance of an argument is so literally applicable to marriage that the entire unconsciousness with which they triumphantly utter the most damning things is irresistibly ludicrous. One speaker said in yesterday’s debate that a vow of obedience is contrary to the

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

English Constitution and a violation of the personal freedom which is the right of everyone. Another expatiated on the hardships of allowing young women under age to bind themselves by an irrevocable engagement when they cannot know what they are binding themselves to. What a sad absence of habitual reflection on the commonest human affairs is shown by its never occurring to these people how far *more* true all this is of marriage ; and the marriage vow too is *legally* binding, which the other, in this country, is *not*."

The low legal status of women scarcely affected working women. Working men, after all, were equally insignificant in the eye of the law until the passing of the New Reform Act of 1867 gave them the vote ; and it was many years after they received votes before they became sufficiently conscious of themselves as a class with special needs and special aims to make themselves a power in the state. Until well into the twentieth century, Gilbert's lines, "every little boy and girl that's born into the world alive is either a little Liberal or else a little Conservative" was, for all practical political purposes, as true of the labouring man and his woman as of the other classes.

Considerations based on property being non-existent among the workers, the absence of divorce facilities was ignored. Sex relationships were much nearer the fundamentals of nature, and though many working

## MARRIAGE : PROPERTY : PROSTITUTION

girls looked upon marriage as the symbol of release from factory or workshop, it often failed to be so and left them wage earners as before. In that case, they found their lives doubly toilsome, since after a day's work in factory or mine, they came home and spent the night, or a large part of it, in household duties which their men rarely shared, or if they did, did so secretly and as of a thing to be ashamed. Low wages and a continuous accession of new mouths to feed, new little bodies to be clothed made the life of the working man's wife, even when she herself did not also go out into the labour market, as much drudgery as one human being could well bear. Marriages that were too unsatisfactory to be borne were abandoned, and the man and woman involved contracted new alliances without encountering the social ostracism of their equals that made similar conduct a matter of heroism in the middle and upper classes. The poor who, by the fact of their poverty alone, could but live from day to day were nearer to the realities of living than those for whom property, social prestige, observance of conventions formed a triple stockade round their lives and actions. A man without property had no need to label his wife, his children as his in the eye of the law. To the conscientious husband and father, no legal obligation was needed to promote his care for those with whom he had entwined his life ; while a man careless of the duties society thus imposed on him, and unaffected by the social considerations that weighed with the middle classes, had an

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

advantage in tying no legal knots to bind him against his will.

But if there was no joy in the conjugal relationship (and a case known to me of a marriage that lasted over twenty years, during which union took place every day without once giving pleasure to the wife, was so common that had the wife been brazen enough to utter a complaint she would have excited profound astonishment among her fellow wives), men had a very clear idea that sex had other connotations. It was indeed an accepted thing that the “irregular indulgence of a natural impulse” in men was a necessity. “A man would only be expected to maintain ; yes, barely grant a subsistence, to a woman rendered odious by habitual intoxication ; but who would expect him, or think it possible to love her ?” wrote Mary Wollstonecraft, “ and unless ‘youth, and genial years were flown,’ it would be thought equally unreasonable to insist . . . that he should not love another : whilst woman, weak in reason, impotent in will, is required to moralise, sentimentalise herself to stone, and pine her life away, labouring to reform her embruted mate.” And in one of the letters of her contemporary, Fanny Burney, occurs the following significant phrase : “When I put him [her little son] down and made up to the sofa for my letter, he began crying again . . . yet he could not express himself better in words than by merely saying, ‘I don’t like ou to ead a letter, mamma !’—He had never happened

## MARRIAGE: PROPERTY: PROSTITUTION

to see me in tears before: happy boy!—and, oh, happy mother!"

"The boundaries of duty, religion, and social necessity are walls round a woman's heart and light fences round a man's," wrote Mrs. Norton, ". . . So easy, so little a bar to him that, let passion but spur him, and he leaps at once."

During the debate on the Divorce Act of 1857, a member opposed the introduction of a clause granting divorce to both sexes equally with the question, "If this clause were adopted, I should like to know how many married men there would be in this house?"—a sally that was greeted with "shouts of laughter." If marriages could be dissolved at pleasure, argued the already quoted Sir J. Fitzjames Stephen, Q.C., "it would make women the slaves of their husbands. A woman loses the qualities which make her attractive to men much earlier than men lose those which make them attractive to women. . . . A woman who is no longer young . . . would thus be absolutely in her husband's power, in nine cases out of ten, if he might put an end to the marriage when he pleased"—a pronouncement that calls up a heart-chilling vision of the arid foundations on which too many Victorian marriages were founded.

But though men were convinced that a certain amount of "irregular indulgence" was necessary to them, they could not go to women of their own kind for the satisfaction they needed. They were obsessed by what George Meredith called "false

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

sensations concerning the soiled purity of woman, the lost innocence, the brand of shame upon her . . . commonly the foul sentimentalism of such as can be too eager in the chase of corruption when occasion suits . . . another side of purity.” These “false sensations,” that banished joy from the marriage bed, made well-nigh unthinkable any “impure” approach towards women of their own circle. And the women played up to this attitude : it was, after all, necessary to them if they were to sell satisfactorily in the marriage market the one asset, their virginity, that far too many of them possessed. The ideas that a woman might equally need “irregular indulgence,” or that a self-respecting man and a self-respecting woman could give one another, in simple honesty and without calculation, the “indulgence” needed by both of them, were so remote from the general middle-class view of life and living as to be virtually non-existent.

As a result, the man’s natural impulse was driven into ugly underground channels where indulgence was frequently dangerous not merely to the man but to his wife and unborn children. He could not choose a woman of his own class and kind. Therefore he had to go below him, to those girls of another clay who were privileged to serve his own women so long as they remained “pure,” and might serve him once they had lost their purity. The trade of the prostitute expanded with our expanding exports. “From 3 o’clock in the afternoon, it is impossible for any respectable woman to walk from the top of the Hay-

## MARRIAGE : PROPERTY : PROSTITUTION

market to Wellington Street, Strand," stated the Director of Criminal Investigations in 1881. "From 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon, Villiers Street and Charing Cross Station, and the Strand are crowded with prostitutes, who are openly soliciting prostitution in broad daylight. At half-past twelve at night, a calculation was made a short time ago that there were five hundred prostitutes between Piccadilly Circus and the bottom of Waterloo-place." To this army of "fallen" women, and all its implications, the virtuous woman was supposed to be blind—in fact, in the majority of cases genuinely was so. Her husband had but to hint that there were matters into which, if she wished to remain a pure and worthy wife, she would not enquire, and her interest or curiosity in the things outside her circumscribed domestic life was silenced. There are none so blind as those who will not see. The Victorian woman's blindness to the realities of any segment of life but her immediate own was the basis of her comfort and contentment.

## CHAPTER V

### THE ROAD TO EDUCATION

“ ‘Educate women like men,’ says Rousseau, ‘and the more they resemble our sex the less power will they have over us.’ This is the very point I aim at. I do not wish them to have power over men ; but over themselves.”

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT (1792).

DR. ARNOLD has much more to answer for than the reform of the public schools. The impetus he gave to education spread far beyond any range he had contemplated. Beginning in Rugby and extending rapidly to the other boys' schools of ancient standing, in the course of a generation or two it had overflowed even into the field of girls' education. The boys he had influenced went back to their homes with a new vision of what education meant, and with minds discontented with the older order of things. They found their sisters and female cousins and friends particularly disconcerting in their facile charms and abysmal ignorance, and it is to the influence of these boys grown to manhood that the great urge towards the education of women can be traced. In the biographies of one after another of the women pioneers who opened the educational way for their sister women, one reads that she was encouraged in her work

## THE ROAD TO EDUCATION

by her brother or her father or some other male relation. Anne Jemima Clough, from whose work Newnham was born, was the sister of a favourite pupil of Arnold ; Emily Davies had a brother who was a great friend of F. D. Maurice ; Josephine Butler was helped and encouraged in all her activities—and not least in her efforts for the improvement of women's education—by her husband, who was for many years principal of Liverpool College ; Elizabeth Garrett, who helped to open the medical profession to women, worked with the full approval of her father—and the disapproval of her mother.

It is the way with some feminists to imagine that all the credit for the change in women's status is due to the efforts of their own sex. So far is this from the truth that women would probably still be in the abyss of ignorance in which they lay a hundred years ago if it were not for the stimulus the pioneers received from their menfolk. Beings with untrained and undisciplined minds could never have accomplished what they did, however ardent their desires, however steadfast their wills, unless they had been braced and encouraged by men with trained and disciplined minds.

In the early years of last century there was, to all intents and purposes, no education for girls. Those whose parents were comfortably off passed their childhood and early adolescence under the care of distressed ladies turned governess who had little more knowledge than their charges, and whose only

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

incentive in taking up their calling had been the dire necessity of earning their living somehow. Untrained and easily replaced, the majority of governesses of last century were timorous beings who could not afford to exhibit force of character. The advertisement composed in 1847 by Charlotte Brontë for the heroine of "*Jane Eyre*" when she wished to secure a post as governess—"She is qualified to teach the usual branches of a good English education, together with French, drawing and music"—is almost identical with an actual advertisement culled from the columns of the "*Queen*" newspaper in the 'seventies: "A young lady, perfectly competent to teach French, English, and good music wishes to find a situation where there are two or three young children. Salary £25." Nor did the rate of pay vary much, Jane, it will be remembered, obtaining £30 a year for her services.

Unless the aspiring governess happened to be selected by a family where the children were docile and agreeable by nature, her lonely life was frequently made intolerably burdensome by the hostility and malignity of the girls and little boys she was supposed to have under her control. Governesses in congenial surroundings found their labours difficult. With no preparation and little inclination for their work, how could it be otherwise? They had to struggle perpetually with their own ignorance as well as that of their pupils. The public libraries were non-existent. Mr. Mudie began to lend novels in the 'fifties, but it was many a long year after that before works of a

## THE ROAD TO EDUCATION

solid character were available, even in towns, to the poor scholar. From the tiny wages they received, they could not afford to buy books with which to improve their ill-equipped minds. In houses where books and learning were held in esteem, they might find mental food to supply their own needs. But of the multiple homes of the newly prosperous middle classes, how few there were that had any love of books !

From the care of their governess, the girls in a well-to-do family—or one which had any pretensions to be so—generally went to a “finishing” school, where they lived with other girls of their own kind, and the faulty or inadequate tuition of their governess in such vital matters as walking, deportment, dancing, dressing, singing and water-colour painting was rectified, until they were turned out at last ready to face the world and find a suitor. Having found and married a husband, they settled down to breed—and to recapitulate in the lives of their daughters the inanities of their own upbringing. How could they do otherwise ? It was the only way of living for women that had ever come within their ken.

It was at its base that Tennyson’s friend, the Rev. F. D. Maurice, attacked the problem. When their father lost his money, Maurice’s sister Mary had set up a school at Southampton. Through her pupils, she came into contact with a number of governesses ; and both she and her brother were active workers in support of the Governesses’ Benevolent Institution.

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

The knowledge Maurice acquired through his own experiences and his sister's showed his fine mind very clearly in what hopelessly inadequate hands lay the education of the English girls of his day. He saw that unless the governess could be taught, she could never teach her charges—and the endless spiral would never be broken. In 1847, he persuaded his fellow professors at King's College, London, to set up a committee to examine the qualifications of ladies engaged, or proposing to engage, in teaching, and from this committee sprang the first school for women that had any claim to a standard in matters of learning : Queen's College, opened in 1848 expressly for the training of governesses. Women who had to become governesses, women who were governesses, women who had been running their own schools flocked to this oasis in the desert of their abounding ignorance. The success of the scheme was instantaneous. The founders were not disappointed : the thirst for knowledge they had sensed was there waiting to be quenched.

Queen's College had some claim to a standard : but what that standard was can be gauged from the fact that a student after only one year's tuition there became teacher in mathematics to her fellow students. But where absolute ignorance had reigned, even the most elementary systematised instruction was a valuable gain. The year after the opening of Queen's College for Women, Bedford College for Ladies was founded through the efforts of Mrs. Reid. Unlike Queen's,

## THE ROAD TO EDUCATION

Bedford College had a mixed committee of management—a fact which certainly did not decrease its usefulness. In less than ten years there was a perceptible difference not only in the attitude towards, but also in the state of, female education in England, owing to the diffusion through the land of the students of these two pioneer places of instruction for women. In particular prominence were the achievements of two among the first two hundred students of Queen's. One, Miss Buss, began at the age of fourteen to teach in a school run by her mother. At eighteen she took control of it. Three years later she attended evening courses at Queen's College, continuing to teach at her own school during the day. Within two years she had re-organised her school, re-named it the North London Collegiate School for Girls, and thus brought into being a day school for girls that set a definite standard for the emulation of the Girls' Public Day School Trust, founded in 1872, and has maintained its position as a first-rate school ever since.

Another, Miss Beale, was one of those girls who, in the words of the Victorian woman poet, Augusta Webster, *stole* her early education by helping her brothers with their homework. In this way she taught herself Latin and Greek. She it was who became teacher of mathematics at Queen's College after a year's tuition there. This post she held until 1856, when she resigned because she considered that the women teachers and visitors had too little say in the management of this man-founded and man-managed

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

school for women. She spent an unprofitable year at the Clergy Daughters School at Cowan Bridge, where the Brontë sisters were educated, and which Charlotte pilloried as Lowood in "Jane Eyre." Then she received, and accepted, an invitation to take control of a recently founded and not very successful girls' school at Cheltenham. She had hard work to get the school on a sound footing, but she succeeded ; and with the opening of the first boarding-house in 1864 the first school for girls on public school lines came into existence.

Like other pioneers in women's education, Miss Beale found one of her greatest difficulties in the prejudices of parents. Many a fond papa and mamma had come to the conclusion that Mary Jane and Elizabeth Ann ought to be properly educated—but not, oh, please not, on the same lines as their brothers. Miss Beale was a diplomatist : she wished to instruct her pupils, but she could not afford to alienate their parents. "Physical Geography" was a subject not usually included in the curriculum of boys' schools, a subject that had been completely ignored at Oxford until, in the eighteen-fifties, George Butler (afterwards Canon Butler) introduced it to the knowledge of the dons by a series of lectures that promoted first amusement and then interest. Miss Beale used it to cover instruction in a variety of subjects beyond the range of the average girls' education, and therefore likely to prove obnoxious to parents not in the van of the new movement. In this diplomatically devious

## THE ROAD TO EDUCATION

method there is surely a faint echo of her own “stolen” acquisition of Latin and Greek by helping her brothers, and thus making use of their books.

There was still, however, no outside measure against which to test the educational acquirements of girls. In 1862, two things happened. Elizabeth Garrett applied to the University of London for permission to sit for the matriculation examination. She was refused, on the ground that the Senate had no power to grant her request. Her father took the matter up, presenting a memorial to the Senate suggesting that they should obtain a modification of the Charter which would empower them to examine women. The Senate rejected this suggestion also, by the casting vote of the then Chancellor, Lord Granville. In the same year, Frances Power Cobbe, one of the first successful women journalists, read a paper before the Social Science Congress on women in relation to the universities. Her suggestions were widely greeted with ridicule: but not universally, for they had as an outcome the formation of a committee, of which Emily Davies was the secretary, that sought to obtain the admission of girls to the Cambridge Local Examinations.

The Cambridge Syndicate was approached and, though it would not examine girls officially, agreed six weeks before the date of the examination to supply the committee with copies of the papers, and to allow it to make any private arrangements it cared with the examiners for the marking of the sets of

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

answers. This was a real step towards the attainment of the committee's object, and with great zeal it managed to collect ninety-one candidates in the short time at its disposal. The results were what might have been expected: measured by a general standard, the best educated girls of the day proved to be poorly equipped, particularly in arithmetic. However, a few years later these examinations were thrown open officially to girls; and at last the girls' schools had a definite goal to place before their students.

Encouraged by this success, Emily Davies became more audacious. Mrs. Strachey, in her book "*The Cause*," says, without vouching for the strict accuracy of the report, that in the course of a conversation between Elizabeth Garrett and Emily Davies in their girlhood, the later remarked: "Well, Elizabeth, it's quite clear what has to be done. I must devote myself to securing higher education, while you open the medical profession to women. After these things are done, we must see about getting the vote." Whether true or not, that remark sets first things first—and in the achievement of these first things, education and the right to enter the professions, these two energetic women found their lives absorbed, with little left over for the attainment of that secondary object, the vote. Economic independence is the essence of personal freedom; to achieve economic independence, middle-class women had to be educated to the limits of their capacity. And Emily Davies now set her heart on achieving university training for women under

## THE ROAD TO EDUCATION

university conditions. She promoted the formation of another committee, whose object was the foundation of a residential college for women. She invited the collaboration of the Cambridge professors in her scheme—and was somewhat alarmed and sceptical at the youth of the dons who showed themselves anxious to serve on her committee. A great stickler for propriety, she would have preferred the staider counsels of more experienced men. But much as she was inclined to fear it, the enthusiasm of the younger dons must have warmed her heart as deeply as the timidity of her women committee members must have caused her sometimes to despair of her sex. Her plans progressed so well that in 1869 she was able to lease a house at Hitchin, where the first six women students—"all past twenty," and looking "discreet young women"—took up residence. The difficulties of getting proper lectures for her students, however, soon convinced her that she must choose a situation nearer the fount of learning, and a year later a site was bought at Girton, two miles from Cambridge—near enough to make visits to lectures in Cambridge and of professors to Girton a comparatively simple matter, even in those days of elementary transport, far enough to give "the necessary feeling of safety to parents." Miss Davies's energy that would not be balked had secured the papers for Little Go for her first six students by the same sort of private arrangement with the examining professors that had been made over the Cambridge Local Examinations in

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

1863. Five of them were found to be up to the required standard. In 1873, the year her girls moved to Girton, a grace was brought forward in the Cambridge Senate, and rejected, proposing that the Tripos Examinations should be opened to women. Three candidates presented by Miss Davies for private examination were declared to have attained the necessary standard for passing—two in the second class, one in the third. This system of private examination went on until 1881, when the Tripos Examinations were thrown open to women: but women had to wait another forty years before they were allowed to use the titles of the degrees they had gained at Cambridge, and even to-day they are not admitted to membership of the university, and so are deprived of the university franchise.

The early history of Newnham, Girton's sister college at Cambridge, is very different. While Miss Davies, "the quiet, demure little rector's daughter," set before herself from the beginning the attainment for women of university education under the same conditions of work, terms of residence, and examination as men, the founders of Newnham were more in line with the feeling of the times they lived in in that they desired to secure better education for women, but education along lines adapted to what they truly believed to be women's lower capacities. Almost in spite of itself, Newnham was ultimately swept into line with the one year older Girton.

Whereas Girton sprang from the indefatigable

## THE ROAD TO EDUCATION

labours of one woman determined that to women should be opened the same educational opportunities as were enjoyed by men, Newnham owes its existence to quite other circumstances. In the middle 'sixties, a little group of people, among whom the moving spirits were Josephine Butler and Anne Jemima Clough, formed themselves into what came to be called the North of England Council for the Higher Education of Women. Its object was to organise series of lectures for women on subjects outside the scope of any educational institution at that time open to them in the North of England. Mrs. Butler was president, Miss Clough secretary of the organisation.

These two women were a remarkable contrast. Mrs. Butler was the daughter of John Grey of Dilston, whose active public life had been passed in strenuous work against slavery. By temperament and by the influence of her early surroundings, Mrs. Butler was a passionate lover of liberty. From her girlhood she had been oppressed by the injustice under which women suffered, and though a happy marriage softened the bitterness of this oppression, the consciousness of it remained and actuated her throughout her life. A happy wife and a happy mother, with every opportunity for intellectual pursuits and interests, she was not content merely to enjoy this full and fruitful existence: she was irresistibly impelled to do her utmost to bring the same fullness and richness into other women's lives.

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

She was, indeed, an exception even among the exceptional women of her time. Most of them confined their activities to one aspect of the fight for women's freedom ; wherein they were probably wise. But it strikes one now as a little strange that Mrs. Norton, who did such valiant work in obtaining for the mother some rights over her children, should have so vehemently disclaimed the epithet of advanced woman ; that Florence Nightingale, who did as much as any one person to help women to independence by opening up a new occupation to them, should have objected for so long to have her name associated with the struggle for the vote ; that Emily Davies, with her passion for advancing education, should have been equally fearful of those women workers for the suffrage whom she regarded as "extremists."

Josephine Butler's name is connected in most minds with the agitation for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts ; but her activities in promoting women's education had an equal importance.

Miss Clough, her chief collaborator in these activities, was a maiden lady possessing modest means, and at the time of the inception of the North of England Council was not far short of fifty years old. Mrs. Butler was a brilliant speaker, a fascinating personality with a depth of sincere enthusiasm and an ascetic devotion to what she conceived her duty that captivated all who came into contact with her. By the force of her shining goodness, she was, so her biographers tell us, inevitably the centre of any group

## THE ROAD TO EDUCATION

in which she appeared. Miss Clough was shy and expressed herself badly. She had lived isolated with a sick mother. The great influence in her life had been her brother Arthur, who had been a favourite pupil of Arnold's, but who lived very little at home after he reached adult years and died when he was not much over forty. As single women's lives went in those days, hers would be reckoned full : she had her mother and a household to care for ; she had a companion, she had means, and for a number of years she ran a small school for the children of tradesmen and farmers in the neighbourhood of her home at Ambleside. She had no method, but a great love of teaching, and from her somewhat casually presented lessons her pupils carried away a store of pictures of foreign lands and foreign peoples such as no more formal instruction would have given them. But in the midst of these activities she had a sense of restlessness and wasted energy that only began to find an outlet when, her mother dead, she was able to throw herself into the business of organising lectures for the North of England Council.

The first series, on astronomy, was given by James Stuart, afterwards Professor of Mechanics and Engineering at Trinity College, Cambridge, and the creator of University Extension education. He was an intimate friend of both the Butlers and the Fawcetts. He subsequently gave up his professorship to become manager of his father-in-law's business at Norwich, and went into Parliament, succeeding Henry Fawcett

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

after the latter's death as member for Hackney. In the Commons he took an important part in keeping alive the opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts.

This first series of lectures to the ladies of the North proved an immense success—the lecturer, to his astonishment, received over three hundred papers, answering the written questions he had set. The services of other Cambridge men were secured, and so great was the interest of the women that the University was requested by the Council to organise a special examination for these eager students. In 1869, it consented to do so ; and the examination thus founded for women was five years later opened to men also, and became known as the Higher Local Examination. The lectures themselves were ultimately absorbed into the University Extension scheme.

But meanwhile, among the Cambridge dons who had become interested in the lectures was Mr. Henry Sidgwick. With the help of Professor and Mrs. Fawcett, a sister of Elizabeth Garrett, he got together a committee of influential men and women, and in 1870 lectures for women were introduced into Cambridge itself. Students flocked to them, not only from the town of Cambridge, but from the country round and about, and it became necessary to find some means of housing those whose homes were outside the town in a way that would be convenient to them and acceptable to their parents. The committee decided to take a house, and Miss Clough was invited to act as superintendent. She accepted, and in

## THE ROAD TO EDUCATION

October, 1871, took up residence at 74, Regent Street, with five students. Things did not run smoothly between Miss Clough and her first boarders. She was inclined to treat them as schoolgirls, and her shy and somewhat timorous manner formed a barrier to a better understanding. The girls were themselves pioneers who had frequently had to overcome the opposition of family and friends before embarking on a college career. They felt themselves adult and were, in consequence, inclined to rebel. Miss Clough, primly old-maidenish in her soft ways, had dread of the unladylike, characteristic of many of the advanced women of her day, developed to an exaggerated degree. At times she appeared almost more anxious that her students should remain ladylike than that they should acquire the coveted learning for which they had come to Cambridge. As one reads her life, one finds her constant reiteration of the need for her girls to avoid being conspicuous in dress or manner a little wearisome. Her advice to them to wear gloves without buttons if they found they had insufficient time to fasten buttoned gloves properly before going into the street has the same faintly unpleasant tang of falsity as had the advice I once heard given by a clergyman to a group of young people : "Read your bible in the 'bus or the train going to and from your work—you can buy it nowadays bound to look like a novel."

Girls who wanted to be educated, girls who became educated no longer belonged to Victorian ladyhood, and the attempt to make them appear to conform had,

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

in all probability, exactly the opposite effect to that intended : it made them the readier to escape from the label once they had escaped from tutelage.

Newnham pursued its avowed purpose of offering women an opportunity to acquire a higher education adapted to their supposed lesser capacities until 1881, when the Tripos Examinations were thrown open to women, and gave an object and incentive to their studies such as had been given to girls' secondary education by the opening to them of the Cambridge Local Examinations in 1866.

Oxford lagged behind Cambridge in providing for the needs of women. Lectures similar to those originated by the North of England Council were started in 1869, but they died of lack of interest. Three years later a successful effort was made to re-start them, and in 1879 Lady Margaret Hall and Somerville were opened to accommodate students from outside the town. Women were admitted to most of the examinations for honours in 1884, but proposals to confer degrees on them were rejected again and again, until in 1919, on the wave of war-time enthusiasm for women's work and capacity, they were at last not only allowed to use the titles of the degrees they won, but also admitted to full membership of the university. Oxford lagged behind Cambridge at the beginning ; but surpassed it in generosity in the end.

Long before the old universities had succumbed to reason, however, London and the provincial universities had given women the same chances and

## THE ROAD TO EDUCATION

recognition as men—a state of affairs which came about through the struggle to secure the admission of women to the study of medicine. “Women,” wrote Mary Wollstonecraft, “might certainly study the art of healing, and be physicians as well as nurses.” But it was sixty years before the first woman, Elizabeth Blackwell, put her name on the British Medical Register.

Elizabeth Blackwell was born in England, the third in a family of nine. When she was eleven years old, the family migrated to America, and there in 1838, Elizabeth being then seventeen, her father died, leaving a widow and nine children entirely unprovided for. She and her two elder sisters — set up a day and boarding school by which they managed to maintain the family home. But Elizabeth’s ambitions sought some other outlet, and seven years later she began her quest for medical instruction, warmly supported by both the male and the female members of her family. She applied methodically to various institutions, beginning with the larger and going on to the smaller, and was as methodically refused. “You cannot,” said the dean of one of the smaller schools, “expect us to furnish you with a stick to break our heads with.” Miss Blackwell observes in her autobiography that there seemed to be a widespread notion among American medical men that rapid practical success would attend a woman doctor, and relates that one man eminent in his profession wanted to enter into partnership with her, “on condition of sharing

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

profits over five thousand dollars on her first year's practice"!

At last, to her own surprise, she was accepted in 1847 by the medical department of Geneva University, one of the minor universities of New York State. The principal informed her that her request had been granted on a resolution passed unanimously by the students themselves "that the application of Elizabeth Blackwell to become a member of our class meets our entire approbation." None, it would appear from an article published twenty-five years later by one of her co-students, were more surprised at her appearance in their midst than the young men, "rude, boisterous, and riotous beyond comparison," who had passed the resolution as a good joke, and a "rag"; and none, possibly, were more delighted with her enrolment than the tutors and professors who instructed the class: for the entry into class of this quiet, quietly dressed, attentive young woman had a completely sobering effect on the boisterous and unruly youths, who showed her the utmost friendliness.

She passed her examinations successfully, and the principal was most anxious that she should join the procession of students to the hall where degrees were to be conferred. She peremptorily refused—on the ground that "it wouldn't be ladylike." Had she known then what she learned later—that the ladies of Geneva regarded her as either a bad, designing woman, or, more charitably, an insane one, for pursuing her medical studies at all, she might have followed

## THE ROAD TO EDUCATION

her already unladylike college career to its natural end.

Having gained her degree, she came to Europe, where she spent an uncomfortable year at the Maternité in Paris studying obstetrics under the only conditions she could come by it—as a sort of nursing pupil. She lost the sight of one eye (for a time she feared complete blindness) owing to the fact that whilst syringing the eye of one of her infant patients for purulent ophthalmia a drop of the water spurted into her own eye. She went through a period of intense depression ; but she recovered her enthusiasm and continued her search after knowledge in London, where every department of St. Bartholomew's Hospital was cordially opened to her—except that for female diseases ! She met Florence Nightingale, who told her that she could be perfectly happy working with her—that she should want no other husband ; and then she returned to New York, where in 1857 she opened an Infirmary for Women and Children staffed entirely by women. In 1858 she paid another visit to England, placed her name on the British Medical Register, and delivered a series of lectures in Marylebone Hall, at the first of which Elizabeth Garrett was fired to follow in her footsteps.

Elizabeth Garrett, as has already been mentioned, tried, with her father's active support, to secure entrance to the University of London, but failed. Miss Blackwell was almost the last practitioner to get her name on the British Medical Register in virtue of a

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

foreign degree, holders of such degrees only being excluded in the following year—a step that was not aimed at women, but, as it happened, made their struggle for medical recognition all the harder. Miss Garrett, for instance, decided to study in Paris ; but as she wanted to practise in England she sought for some way of getting on to the register before going abroad. She found that the rules of the Apothecaries Society did not expressly exclude women from their examinations, and as their diploma entitled its holder to put his name on the British Medical Register, she sat for, and passed, this examination, and thus gained the necessary recognition before going off to Paris, where she subsequently gained the degree of M.D. Four more women tried to follow her example—and steps were taken to tighten up the rules of the society and so circumvent this surreptitious way of getting on to the register.

Nothing more was done towards opening the medical schools to women until the return from America of a fiery young woman named Sophia Jex-Blake. At the age of nineteen, she had become lecturer in mathematics at Queen's College, and seemed to have settled into the teaching profession ; but her visit to America changed the course of her life. While there she met a follower of Dr. Blackwell, and became convinced that medicine was the career to which she was called. When she got back to England, she tried to persuade both likely and unlikely institutions to admit her to study. She failed. Then

## THE ROAD TO EDUCATION

she decided to do for herself and other would-be medical students what Emily Davies had done at Cambridge : find some place of medical learning where she could persuade the professors to instruct women privately, in the hope of being able to gain admission to the examinations afterwards. She managed to do this at Edinburgh ; but she and her fellow students got their instruction at the cost of the grossest insults from the men students, one of the least ugly of whose pranks was to push a sheep into the hall where the young women were attending a lecture on anatomy by Dr. Handyside. "Let it stay," exclaimed the enraged instructor, "it has more sense than those who sent it." But the legal difficulties of securing access to the examinations proved insuperable, and in 1872, after three years in Edinburgh, Miss Jex-Blake came back to London, determined to found a school of medicine for women since there seemed no means of getting into the men's schools. She was joined in her enterprise by Elizabeth Garrett. A house was taken in Hunter Street, Bloomsbury, and the London School of Medicine for Women came to birth in 1874, by the faith and energy of one determined, optimistic woman with the help of another. Elizabeth Blackwell, by then permanently settled in England, accepted the chair of gynecology.

Women now had a place in which they could study medicine theoretically ; but they still had no means of acquiring recognised degrees, without which they could not practise. This difficulty was overcome by

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

the passing a year later of the Enabling Act, by which universities were empowered to grant degrees to women if they so desired. King's and Queen's College of Physicians in Dublin immediately consented to examine women and grant them degrees ; and the Royal Free Hospital in London agreed to accept students from the London School of Medicine for Women. Degrees and a field for practical work in medicine were at last open to women, who took up the new study with enthusiasm despite the common fear, given expression by Sir Alexander Cockburn, the Lord Chief Justice, that ladies acquiring medical knowledge would become “less pure-minded.”

The University of London, which had opened its classes to women in 1869, granted them access to degrees, under the Enabling Act, eleven years later. The provincial universities soon fell into line—and university education for women was an accomplished fact.

## CHAPTER VI

### NEW FIELDS

“One of the characteristics of the improved spirit of the present time is the growing tendency to the elevation of women, towards their relief from disabilities, their increased estimation, the assignment to them of a higher position, both social and domestic.”

JOHN STUART MILL (1851).

EDUCATION for women was launched in order that they might be fitted to educate other women, and for many years after the establishment of Queen’s College, teaching was the profession that absorbed most of the eager young students who passed through school and college and, as the years sped by, went out into the world in ever-increasing numbers, anxious to hand on the fruits of their own training. Miss Buss and Miss Beale had had difficulty in staffing their pioneer schools adequately ; but by the time the Girls’ Public Day School Trust was founded in 1872, there were a number of qualified women ready to take up the posts that offered. The introduction of compulsory elementary education in 1892 still further widened the teaching opportunities open to women ; and the gradual elimination of the old type of school for young ladies, where manners, deportment, and accomplishments were the main teaching, and the introduction

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

in their stead of private, as well as public and board, schools where training of the mind and memory was regarded as the main business of the school, changed the whole aspect of women's education, from the base upwards, within fifty years. The father who proudly remarked at the birth of his first child in 1895, "Here's the little Girton girl," was typical of the fathers of his day. The introduction of games into the curriculum of girls' schools and colleges provided posts as games mistresses for girls whose ambitions were athletic in a day when athletic inclinations in women had small opportunities of outlet. Kingsley, that passionate praiser of the open air, declaimed : " If the promoters of higher education for women will compel girls to any training analogous to our public school games . . . if they will steadily forbid tight stays, high heels, and all that interferes with free growth and free motion ; if they will accept the certain physical law, that in order to renovate the brain day by day the growing creature must have plenty of fresh air and play, and that the child who learns for four hours will learn more, and learn it more easily, than the child who learns for the whole eight hours ; if, in short, they will teach girls not merely to understand the Greek tongue, but to copy something of the Greek physical training . . . then they will earn the gratitude of the patriot and the physiologist, by doing their best to stay the downward tendencies of the physique, and therefore ultimately of the morale, in the coming generation of English women." Miss

## NEW FIELDS

Clough, who in 1891 introduced hockey at Newnham because it would, she thought, keep the girls warm in winter, was probably yielding to pressure from students coming by then from secondary schools where games were encouraged and organised.

Gradually women began to penetrate into other walks of life. Certain exceptional women had held journalistic posts in the eighteenth century ; but now ordinarily well-educated women began to find outlets for their energies in newspaper work. “*The Queen*,” a weekly paper for women staffed largely by women, was started in 1861, and still goes on. Several more were launched in the 'eighties and the 'nineties, but these, with the exception of “*The Lady*,” have failed to hold their own in the post-war world. The daily papers began to devote more attention to women's particular interests, and to employ women to deal with them. Here and there women were allowed to demonstrate their capacity for general as well as for “feminine interest” journalism : “*The Daily News*” employed Harriet Martineau as a political leader writer on national, social and international questions in the 'fifties and 'sixties ; the same paper appointed a woman, Mrs. Crawford, as its Paris correspondent in the 'nineties ; Miss Flora Shaw (Lady Lugard) wrote for “*The Times*” on colonial matters ; while “*The Morning Post*” employed Lady Florence Dixie as correspondent during the Boer War of 1880-1, “*The Annual Register*,” nominally edited by Herman Merivale, was in fact edited for a number of years, on

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

account of his indifferent health, by his two sisters. Their account of the Franco-Prussian War was so good that another publisher wanted to bring it out separately —until he learned that it was the work of women. He was apparently afraid to back his own view of its value, since he was convinced that the public would refuse to regard women as capable of dealing with so serious a subject.

Women made a modest entry into the Civil Service under the auspices of Henry Fawcett, the blind Postmaster-General, who had married Millicent, sister of Elizabeth Garrett, and had, as a Professor at Cambridge, helped to found Newnham. The Post Office Savings Bank began to appoint women clerks in 1881, and women were brought in to handle postal orders, a new service instituted in the same year. Under the Factory Act of 1891, women were eligible for appointment as factory inspectors, and two were nominated by Kensington Vestry in 1893. The large number of candidates, commented the "*Queen*" newspaper, is "a convincing proof of the large number of well educated women seeking profitable and useful employment." At first all Civil Service appointments were by nomination. Later they were made on the results of open competitive examination. By degrees women, as clerks, typists, and sorters, penetrated into all the departments of the Civil Service. These posts, modest as were the salaries they carried, were permanent and pensionable. They offered an attractive and safe alternative to girls whose tempera-

## NEW FIELDS

ment suited them for routine administrative work rather than for teaching. The introduction of the modern typewriter in 1878 opened a new profession for women. "Many large firms at the present time," wrote Phyllis Browne in 1880, in a book entitled "What Girls Can Do," "employ girls instead of young men as clerks and book-keepers. The work is particularly suited to girls; it does not call for physical strength, and it can be pursued quietly indoors, without the worker exposing herself to pushes and knocks from the outside world."

But perhaps the greatest impetus to the employment of women above the working-class in a capacity other than as governesses came from Florence Nightingale's momentous expedition to the Crimea. "Nothing could more strongly exhibit the perplexed state of feeling and opinion in this country," wrote Mrs. Anna Jameson in 1855, "than the manner in which Mr. Sidney Herbert's proposal to send off a staff of voluntary female nurses to our hospitals in the East, and Miss Nightingale's consent to place herself at the head of them, were received by the people and commented on by the newspapers. There was, indeed, a genuine spontaneous burst of admiration from the public heart, mixed up, however, with fear, with incredulity, with amazement, as if it were a thing unheard of, unknown, and now for the first time attempted, that women of refined habits, and holding a certain position in society, should, from motives of piety and humanity, become nurses in a hospital.

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

‘Common-sense’ styled them *romantic*, a convenient epithet, by which the worldly-minded set the seal of reprobation on anything which steps beyond the bounds of conventionalism. . . . The hopeful and the liberal-minded were troubled by a vision of a hundred enthusiastic sentimental women rushing off to Scutari, and on their arrival there falling into hysterics. . . . I have seen men who deem it quite a natural and necessary thing that a woman—*some* women at least—should lead the life of a courtesan, put on a look of offended propriety at the idea of a woman nursing a sick soldier.” The same writer records that when a few years earlier, Sir Edward Parry, the head of the naval hospital at Haslar, appealed for three or four “respectable women” to undergo proper training in order that they could superintend others in the nursing of the sick under his care, he received not a single offer. The idea that nursing required training was, of course, novel; and one of the difficulties in the way of achieving proper nursing arose from the fact that there was no training centre readily accessible. Florence Nightingale had been to Kaiserswerth, in Germany, at that time the only institution in Europe where regular training in the duties of nursing was available. But the chief reason for the lack of response to Sir Edward Parry’s appeal was that no gentlewoman’s imagination was fired by the prospect of nursing sick sailors in peace-time. To nurse “our noble soldiers” in war-time was a different matter, and the appeal for this service met with a very different

## NEW FIELDS

response. Women who “in the midst of all the splendour of a luxurious home” were perishing “by a slow wasting disease of body and mind because they had nothing to do” jumped at the opportunity for service and sacrifice, and possibly a martyr’s crown, that was offered them. Whatever the motive that prompted their engagement on this service, Florence Nightingale’s nursing gentlewomen proved their usefulness as well as their powers of endurance, and nursing, from being a despised and inferior job, became by degrees a respected profession that had a peculiar attraction for the self-abnegating among middle-class women.

The type of mind that needed to combine practical service to humanity with a mystic sense of direct service to God found solace in the various Protestant orders that came into being during the middle years of the century. In 1840, when he was chaplain at Guy’s Hospital, the Rev. F. D. Maurice wrote, “We have three Protestant Sisters of Charity under education at Guy’s . . . I hope it is the beginning of something good for the land”; and in the following year he returned to the subject: “I feel very anxious to know what we should do to meet the craving for male and, still more, female orders which . . . might be a mighty help in the present awful state of the population.” Actual nunneries, Protestant or Catholic, which J. S. Mill noted as causing such an upset in Parliament in the ’fifties, attracted the rare contemplative type. The Order of Deaconesses,

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

established in 1861 and modelled on the order of deaconesses found in the primitive Christian church, proved an enduring institution that did much good charitable and nursing work among the poor, who themselves found an outlet of similar appeal in the Salvation Army. That amazing organisation, the joint creation of one man and one woman, gave to men and women equality in its service. The craze for "slumming" that arose in the 'seventies led women as well as men students from the colleges to form themselves into East End settlements whose aim was to minister to the poor: a phase of endeavour that Charles Booth's monumental work on the "Life and Labour of the People" showed up as the vain scratching at the surface it was. The foreign mission field gave an added zest of adventure to service for God and humanity; and the medical missions to India and China absorbed a large proportion of the first women to qualify as doctors.

All these openings carried a livelihood with them: modest enough, and in the case of charity workers even more than modest, but at least the London board-school teacher with her £85 a year, and a possibility of £300 as headmistress to urge her on in her career; the civil servant on her £60 a year, with prospects rising to £250, the journalist and the clerk with her thirty shillings or so a week were better off, and had better prospects in front of them, than the unhappy beings whose only resources were needlework, painting or governessing. While it is true that "a

## NEW FIELDS

lady cannot live on thirty shillings a week unless she be content to spend *all* her spare time, and often more, in doing so," as one writer trenchantly put it, at least she can manage better on thirty shillings a week than on ten ; and, at any rate while youth and hope lasted, she was buoyed up by the realisation that she could, with good luck and hard work, attain to something better than that. Wifehood and motherhood might still remain the ardent desire of all save the very few ; but spinsterhood was no longer the nightmare of useless isolation it had been.

Women's efforts at entry into political life were, on the whole, timid and ladylike. The first society for female suffrage was formed at Sheffield in 1857 ; but it was John Stuart Mill who dragged woman suffrage into practical politics. He considered that " all grown persons, both men and women, who can read, write, and perform a sum in the rule of three, and who have not, within some small number of years, received parish relief " should be entitled to vote, and he put female suffrage prominently forward in his election address in 1865 when he stood (and was returned) for Westminster. He believed that women's entry into politics would " strengthen the influences opposed to violence and bloodshed," would prevent " the expulsion of all beauty from common life," and would ensure the discussion of new topics of national importance formerly ignored, and of old ones from new points of view. Many opponents of woman

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

suffrage argued that if women were given votes, they would have to be allowed representatives in the House of Commons—and where would the country be then? But this prospect had no fears for Mill: “We have proved by experience,” he wrote, by the hand of his stepdaughter Helen Taylor, “that exactly in proportion as men and women associate publicly together in a variety of relations not founded on sex, their doing so becomes safe and beneficial, and raises the tone of public morality. . . . Before any woman is likely to be chosen by a sufficient number of electors, public opinion will ensure sufficient propriety of sentiment in the House of Commons to make her presence there perfectly harmless.”

The National Society for Women’s Suffrage was founded in 1867, and in the same year Mill presented the first petition to Parliament. Next year he had cause to rebuke a supporter whose enthusiasm was apparently already damped—“it would show but little perseverance in women if they cannot go on year after year asking for this change of the law, when we remember with what patience these sort of petitions are continually renewed for the various objects which men desire.” But probably Mill did not foresee the long vista of years stretching ahead before woman suffrage was to be granted. Who, indeed, could have imagined the way would be so long when already in 1869 women were given the municipal franchise with scarcely an opposing vote, were empowered both to vote for and to sit on the school boards set up in 1870,

## NEW FIELDS

and in the same year the Women's Disabilities Bill passed its second reading with a majority of 33? But then Mr. Gladstone, who entertained the notion that to vote would somehow trespass upon the purity and refinement of a woman's nature, took a hand: he strongly opposed the bill, and it was lost in committee by 220 votes to 94.

Petitions carrying an average of two hundred thousand signatures were presented to Parliament year after year; bills and resolutions were brought in by Mill, and after he ceased to sit by equally persistent advocates of an apparently hopeless cause. On a number of occasions these passed their second reading with substantial majorities, but they did not get beyond that stage until the arrival of a new century and a new kind of world. The members of the National Society for Women's Suffrage plodded on, holding meetings all over the country but rarely getting into the news. Like the pioneers of the movement for women's higher education, the suffrage leaders dreaded the unladylike and the unorthodox: they did not dare accept Mrs. Besant's help, though she would willingly have given it—the first speech she ever made in public was on woman suffrage—mainly because she had abandoned Christianity. No matter how hard the suffrage leaders followed the fashions, behaved with perfect propriety (when not on public platforms—in itself an indecorous proceeding), and selected young and good-looking girls or happily married wives and mothers as speakers, the idea persisted in men's (and

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

many, many women's) minds that those who demanded the vote were hard-faced, hard-hearted women whose lives had been thwarted by their lack of beauty and charm, and their consequent failure to gain husbands. "The most important thing women have to do," wrote Mill, "is to stir up the zeal of women themselves"—a duty in which they were not very successful.

Meanwhile, the admission of women to boards of guardians and to school boards gave valuable training in public affairs, as well as a sphere of admirable practical usefulness, to the few women who took advantage of these opportunities. That their presence was useful is suggested by the following significant quotation from a book on "Woman's Mission" published in 1893: "I think the keynote of their work [as Guardians] is struck in the view they take of women of low character. It is an absolute article in their creed that every one they see is a human being, fallen, perhaps, out of all knowledge from what he or she was created to be, but still a human being, and as such never to be insulted or degraded. They will not tolerate the coarse joking sometimes heard at Boards where women appear only as paupers, and where none are present as guardians."

The endless colonial wars of Victoria's reign cut off in his prime many a potential husband; the superfluity of the younger sons of the great commercial as well as aristocratic families filled the ships bound for

## NEW FIELDS

America and the Antipodes with a continuous stream of masculine emigrants. Many women were thus deprived of the realisation of their normal expectations of marriage ; but as the century progressed, they began to find life, even without marriage, an adventure that could give them the satisfaction of valued service.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE ADVENT OF BIRTH CONTROL

“ And I should like to know what business there has to be a baby ? ” cried the Squire. “ Couldn’t the baby have waited to come at a more convenient season ? ”

MRS. HENRY WOOD (c. 1870).

POSSIBLY at some time in the world’s history human birth was as simple a matter for all women as it still is, if we are to believe “ Elizabeth ” of the German garden, for the peasants of Poland. For the average woman in Western Europe it has long ceased to be a comfortable function. Women still go gaily to their first confinement. It rarely happens, however, that the first proves so easy an experience that the prospect of a second is faced with equal gaiety. Yet for centuries marriage meant a constant succession of pregnancies and births to any woman not gifted by nature with barrenness. But the population did not increase at anything like the rate implied by this unchecked breeding, partly because the women, often married in their early teens while their bodies were still immature, died too young, from the strain of constant and ill-attended child-bearing ; and partly because of the shocking death-rate among infants.

## THE ADVENT OF BIRTH CONTROL

The women of the upper class suffered as heavily as those of the lower. The recital of her motherhood, all the more heartrending because of its simplicity, by Anne, wife of the Royalist Sir Richard Fanshawe who followed Prince Charles (afterwards Charles II.) into exile, tells the common story of the women of her day, and of those before and for centuries after : “ My dear husband had six sons and eight daughters born and christened, and I miscarried of six more . . . . Harrison, my eldest son, and Henry, my second son ; Richard, my third ; Henry, my fourth ; and Richard, my fifth, are all dead . . . . my eldest daughter Anne lies buried in the Parish Church of Tankersley, in Yorkshire, where she died ; Elizabeth lies in the Chapel of the French Hospital at Madrid, where she died of a fever at ten days old ; my next daughter of her name lies buried in the Parish of Foot’s Cray, in Kent, near Frog-Pool, my brother Warwick’s house, where she died ; and my daughter Mary lies in my father’s vault in Hertford, with my first son Henry . . . . I praise God I have living yourself and four sisters. . . . ” Five children brought to maturity out of twenty conceived and born. . . .

That the death-rate of married women was high is demonstrated by the records of second and third marriages, at a time when divorce was non-existent, to be found in Burke’s Peerage.

The second half of the eighteenth century produced an unprecedented increase in the population of England—between 1750 and 1800 it rose from six and

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

a half millions to nine millions. New ways of living, and the beginning of the industrial revolution, were already creating a condition of affairs in which more human beings contrived to survive the dangers of childhood. This marked increase alarmed the economists who were one of the symptoms of the new era, and one in particular, an obscure curate named Malthus, sprang into fame with an essay on population in which he urged that disaster would rapidly overtake the human race unless something were done to check the natural capacity of man to increase geometrically, while the produce of the soil on which he lived could at best increase arithmetically—and could do even that for a limited time only. To allow things to go on as they were doing would, in Malthus's view, have meant the end of civilised existence within a very short space of years.

Malthus's proposition was accepted as proven by a large number of his thinking contemporaries. But they did not act on his advice as to the means by which the calamity he foresaw could be averted. A man of strict morality, and also, one suspects, of low erotic urge, he advocated late marriage (with absolute continence beforehand), followed by copulation only at such times as it was desired to have a child. It is almost unbelievable that any human being can be so constituted as to suggest to the great mass of his fellows that they should restrict the number of times of performing the sex act throughout their fruitful lives to, one must suppose, at the most some half-

## THE ADVENT OF BIRTH CONTROL

dozen experiences. But this was Malthus's remedy for over-population ; and he has had his followers in every generation down to the present day. "We must on no account do anything which tends directly to encourage marriage," he wrote, "or to remove in any regular and systematic manner that inequality of circumstances which ought always to exist between the single man and the man with a family. . . . One of the most salutary and least pernicious checks to the frequency of early marriages in this country is the difficulty of procuring a cottage, and the laudable habits which prompt a labourer rather to defer his marriage some years in the expectation of a vacancy than to content himself with a wretched mud cabin like those in Ireland." He advocated the severe restriction, and ultimate abolition, of poor-law relief, and the treatment of the indigent as criminal, rather than as unfortunate, beings. His whole attitude to the solution of the problem he had raised was singularly lacking in human kindness and human understanding : though he did suggest that the putting into practice of his theories would benefit women : "If the general age of marriage among women were later the period of youth and hope would be prolonged, and fewer would be ultimately disappointed. . . . However impatiently the privation might be borne by the men, it would be supported by the women readily and cheerfully, and if they could look forward with just confidence to marriage at twenty-seven or twenty-eight, I fully believe that if

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

the matter were left to their choice, they would clearly prefer waiting till this period to the being involved in all the cares of a large family at twenty-five."

But the industrial revolution continued on its way, and men and women continued to come together, inside and outside marriage, and to propagate their species as before, with a complete disregard of Malthus's teaching. The "moral restraint" he advocated would have removed from the lives of masses of men and women their one pleasure, and would have produced such mental, moral, and physical suffering that one cannot contemplate the kind of beings we should have become without fear and horror. Distressful as the sex psychology of many human beings actually is, it would be infinitely more twisted had Malthus's views taken firm root.

A quarter of a century after the publication of Malthus's *Essay*, Francis Place, who called himself "The Radical Tailor," put into print for the first time an advocacy of the mechanical control of conception. Place believed in Malthus's theory of population; but he did not believe in Malthus's remedy. He considered early marriage to be a good thing—his own marriage at the age of twenty had extricated him from a way of living already vicious. Malthus's suggestion of complete continence in marriage was as repugnant to him as it must be to any normal human being. Normal marriage had brought to him the normal result: he was the father of fifteen children, born between 1792 and 1817, five of whom died in

## THE ADVENT OF BIRTH CONTROL

childhood. He knew from experience the drain on the health and purse of struggling parents that comes with a rapidly increasing family, the anguish of sickness without the means to alleviate it. "The hopes of a man who has no other means than those of his own hands to help himself are but too often illusory. None but such as they tell how disappointment preys on them; how as the number of their children increases, hope leaves them; how their hearts sink as toil becomes useless; how adverse circumstances force on them those indescribable feelings of their own degradation, which sink them gradually to the extreme of wretchedness. . . ." he wrote, shortly after the publication in 1822 of his "Illustrations and Proofs of the Theory of Population," the vital passage in which reads: "If . . . it were once clearly understood, that it was not disreputable for married persons to avail themselves of such precautionary means as would, without being injurious to health, or destructive of female delicacy, prevent conception, a sufficient check might at once be given to the increase of population beyond the means of subsistence; vice and misery, to a prodigious extent, might be removed from society, and the object of Mr. Malthus, Mr. Godwin, and of every philanthropic person, be promoted, by the increase of comfort, of intelligence, and of moral conduct, in the mass of the population."

The publication of that passage, uninformative as it is, marks the beginning of the movement for the

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

control of conception by human intelligence in place of blind submission to nature's unreasoning fecundity. Place's book did not have a large sale—it has been estimated that probably no more than five hundred copies were printed; but he did far more than publish this single vital message. He wrote and talked to friends and acquaintances; he had printed and distributed handbills containing practical contraceptive instruction; and he advocated contraception in letters to the working-class publications of the time. Place appears to have been acquainted with two methods—*coitus interruptus*, known in his day as "masculine prudence," and the use by the woman of a sponge, the method he himself favoured. In 1826 came Richard Carlile's contribution to the subject, "Every Woman's Book, or What is Love?"—which is believed by some to have been written by Place himself. It was precise, and had a considerable circulation. Shortly afterwards, two further books reached this country from America: Robert Owen's "Moral Physiology" in 1832 and Charles Knowlton's "Fruits of Philosophy" in 1833. These two books, less crude and more temperate in style than Carlile's "Every Woman's Book," continued to circulate quietly for many years. "Moral Physiology" sold some seventy thousand copies in England and America before the death of its author in 1877; and "The Fruits of Philosophy" which, as will be seen later, played a very important part in the spread of contraceptive knowledge, was repeatedly reprinted. It

## THE ADVENT OF BIRTH CONTROL

mentions *coitus interruptus*, the use of the sheath and of the sponge, and spraying with chemicals. Thirty-three years later, Dr. R. T. Trall published a work on "Sexual Physiology" containing contraceptive information that was not bettered for more than half a century; and in 1868 appeared an anonymous pamphlet on "The Power and Duty of Parents to Limit the Number of their Children," suggesting coughing, sneezing, and violent exercise as preventives, but also mentioning the "safe" period, *coitus interruptus*, and the use of injections after *coitus*; and another, privately printed, on "The Marriage Problem." But the advocacy in public of the mechanical control of conception died down with the fading away of the revolutionary spirit that marked the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the development of the Victorian attitude towards sexual morality. Knowledge of such methods of contraception as were available remained in the hands of a limited number among the already limited number who could read. It was completely cut off from the working-classes in whose service it had been first advocated by Francis Place. They continued to breed, in ignorance and misery, children doomed to die in appalling numbers in their earliest infancy: in 1891 the death-rate among children under five was 78.6 per thousand in London, 95.9 per thousand in Sheffield. Those who struggled into adolescence and stunted maturity lived out their lives of degrading toil, and in their turn reproduced themselves with the same recklessness.

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

An accident brought the subject once more into prominence. Charles Watts, founder of the Rationalist Press Association, a friend of Bradlaugh's and his publisher, had taken over with the stock of another publisher Knowlton's "Fruits of Philosophy." Copies of this long circulated booklet assumed a very different aspect in the hands of a certain Bristol bookseller who illustrated it in his own fashion with prints that scarcely accorded with the serious intent of the text. The police seized the offending book, successfully prosecuted the bookseller for obscenity, and then proceeded to take action against Watts, for the sale of something of whose production he was entirely innocent. Bradlaugh urged him to fight, in defence of the free expression of opinion; and almost convinced him. But at the last minute Watts decided to plead guilty, with the extenuating declaration that he had been ignorant of the contents of the book, even as published by himself. Bradlaugh was furious. He broke off all relations with Watts; borrowed some few hundred pounds in collaboration with Mrs. Besant, and with her set up the Freethought Publishing Company, from which the first book issued was Knowlton's "Fruits of Philosophy," with a new preface signed by Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant, insisting on the right of all shades of opinion to legitimate expression.

Bradlaugh was at this time forty-four years of age, and had behind him a life of incessant struggle for liberty of conscience and the free expression of

## THE ADVENT OF BIRTH CONTROL

opinion. He was the eldest of a family of five. His father, an impecunious clerk of orthodox religious views, early found the headstrong, enquiring boy, who read Tom Paine and listened to freethinking tub-thumpers, beyond his control. Efforts to induce him to give up his early leanings away from orthodoxy by the threat that he would lose his employment drove him, at the age of fifteen, from his parents' home, and eventually into the Dragoon Guards. He served with them in Ireland for three years. There he observed for himself, and never forgot, the woeful plight of the Irish peasant. In 1853 his mother, now a widow, bought him out, and he found work as a solicitor's clerk. His interest in unorthodox opinions had not abated, however, and five years later, at twenty-five years of age, he became president of the London Secular Society. In 1860, he established a paper of his own, the "National Reformer," and from that time he lived, often severely pinched for money, by his writing and his lecturing in support of advanced causes. In his youth, he had been helped by the widow of Richard Carlile, and, possibly through this contact, he was a believer in the necessity of family limitation. Himself, like Francis Place, a working-man, like Francis Place he too believed in the good social effects of early marriage; but he too knew that early marriage without control of conception meant misery for both parents and children. It was, however, to combat the attempt to suppress free expression of opinion, rather than because the

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

particular book involved happened to teach contraception, that he plunged into the struggle.

His colleague and collaborator, Annie Besant, was thirty in 1877. In her girlhood she had been intensely religious. Devout and unawakened, she had at the age of twenty been married, in true Victorian style, to the Rev. Frank Besant with "no more idea of the marriage relation than if I had been four years old instead of twenty." The shock she received from the sudden discovery that life held experiences of which she had never dreamed shook her into a state of mental questioning that led to her separation from her husband and her adhesion to the movement for free thought. Meeting Bradlaugh shortly after the separation, she found in him a friend, a guide, and a practical helper. She discovered that she possessed a remarkable gift for public speaking; and before their acquaintance was many months old, she was assisting Bradlaugh in the production of his paper. Now, she supported him wholeheartedly in his venture into direct publishing. Indeed, she supported him rather against his will in the law action that followed, for he thought that he might have managed the conduct of it with less embarrassment if a woman had not been involved in it with him.

When the newly fledged publishers had decided the date on which they proposed to issue their edition of the "Fruits of Philosophy," Bradlaugh notified the police. The book sold at a tremendous rate—Bradlaugh's daughter, in her life of her father, relates

## THE ADVENT OF BIRTH CONTROL

that "when the Saturday came on which Mr. Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant attended at Stonecutter Street to sell the new edition of the Knowlton pamphlet, my sister and I went with them: not to sell the book—that my father would not allow—but to help in the mechanical work of counting out dozens or in giving change; for although there had been no other advertisement than the one announcement in the 'National Reformer,' the crush of buyers in the little shop was enormous, and in the course of twenty minutes over five hundred copies changed hands, in single copies or in small numbers."

The publishers were arrested and tried before a special jury. The Knowlton booklet was alleged to be "obscene, filthy, lewd, and inciting to unnatural and immoral acts and practices." The case was widely reported in the Press—"The Times" alone gave seven columns to it, reprinting the publisher's preface and a substantial part of Mrs. Besant's and Mr. Bradlaugh's speeches; and though "The Times" felt itself unable to reprint, even in its law reports, parts of the booklet which were read out in court, every reader learned not only that mechanical means of controlling conception were possible, but also the name of a publication explaining them. Bradlaugh made it his business to defend the particular publication; while Mrs. Besant, whose speech occupied most of one day and part of another, made use of this splendid opportunity to express the reformers' attitude to contraception, and their reasons

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

for advocating it, in the interests of current morality. In spite of their eloquence, however, the jury found them guilty of publishing an obscene work, though it exonerated them from any corrupt motive in so doing. In a column leader which appeared on the same day as the verdict, "*The Times*" remarked : "What was really intended by the original prosecutors it hardly becomes us to conjecture. If they are to be judged by the rule of results . . . then there cannot be a question that they are the greater offenders. If on this supposition Mr. Bradlaugh and the co-defendant have slain their thousands, then the prosecutor . . . has slain his tens of thousands, nay, literally, it appears, his hundreds of thousands."

On appeal, judgement was given for the defendants, on the ground that the form of the original indictment was defective. "We give our judgement upon a dry point of law," said Lord Justice Bramwell, "a point of criminal pleading, not on the merits of the case." "I cannot help saying that the verdict stands untouched," remarked Lord Justice Brett, in concurring with Lord Justice Bramwell's view that the indictment could not stand, whatever his opinion of the verdict. "We know not what it was upon, or the particular grounds on which it went; but it is sad that such a charge should have been brought against the female defendant."

During the three years following the case—than which, remarked the Lord Chief Justice in summing-up, "a more ill-advised and more injudicious

## THE ADVENT OF BIRTH CONTROL

proceeding in the way of prosecution was probably never brought into a court of justice" the Freethought Publishing Company sold a hundred and eighty-five thousand copies of "The Fruits of Philosophy." Dr. Marie Stopes, in her book on the history and practice of contraception, expresses the view that the cause of contraception suffered by being identified in the public mind with freethinkers and republicans. There is some truth in that contention. On the other hand, this trial brought knowledge of the fact that conception can be controlled to thousands who would never have heard of it if it had continued to percolate slowly below the surface. The Bradlaugh-Besant trial did for contraception what the militant movement did for women's suffrage: it brought the idea into deeper disrepute in quarters already hostile to it; but it made it "news"—and thus introduced it freshly to thousands of ignorant but receptive minds.

After the trial, Bradlaugh revived the Malthusian League which he had started in the 'sixties. Mrs. Besant published a book on "The Law of Population," in which she repeated the arguments in favour of control of conception that she had brought forward in her defending speech. She also mentioned several contraceptive methods. Over a hundred thousand copies of this work were sold in England in ten years, and in America it sold many more. It was also widely circulated in translations, and was still selling when Mrs. Besant withdrew it in 1891, on her conversion to theosophy. In 1887 appeared Dr.

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

H. A. Allbutt's "The Wife's Handbook," which dealt with pregnancy, birth, and the management of the baby, and included a chapter on "How to prevent Conception," giving the most comprehensive account of the methods then available that had so far been published. In addition to the "safe" period, *coitus interruptus*, injections, the sponge, and the sheath, it also mentioned, for the first time, the Mensinga rubber pessary and soluble quinine pessaries. For issuing this booklet "at so low a price as 6d." Dr. Allbutt was struck off the register of the General Medical Council ; but his booklet continued to sell.

Prosecuting counsel in the Bradlaugh-Besant case described "The Fruits of Philosophy" as a "dirty, filthy book" which would enable the "unmarried female" to "gratify her passions." It was generally recognised that the male, married or unmarried, had the right to gratify his ; but the admission that the unmarried—indeed, any Victorian—female had passions was remarkable. Publicly and privately, it was correct to maintain that she had none. But counsel touched the very basis of woman's enslavement to man, and his to her, in that single phrase. To women, before control of conception became a possibility, sex meant almost inevitable motherhood. For the man, it brings, in nature, no analogous responsibility. Malthus argued that "by the laws of nature, a child is confided directly and exclusively to the protection of its parents. By the laws of nature,

## THE ADVENT OF BIRTH CONTROL

the mother of a child is confided almost as strongly and exclusively to the man who is the father of it." Rather it is the social conscience man has developed that makes him protector of his children, and of the woman who is their mother; and by playing on his sex needs, controlling and repressing her own, ostracising the unmarried mother, and consenting to fulfil man's desire only when he has bound himself to her in the chains of matrimony, woman has attempted to counteract as far as she could the burden of maternity that nature has laid upon her.

God was freely invoked by heroines of Victorian romance as a protection against sexual "sin," but one suspects that it was fear of an illegitimate baby, and consequent social death, rather than of God that kept them on the narrow path of virginity. Once they had cheated temptation, no doubt they were able to fall on their knees in thankfulness that they had escaped eternal damnation and would walk the primrose paths of heaven, if not those of earth. But it is difficult to believe that a woman made of flesh and blood—an "ardent, expectant woman," as Charlotte Brontë described her Jane Eyre on her first abortive wedding-day—could have resisted a loved lover from a sense that she was sinning. Ardent desire knows no such feeling: but even ardent desire (in woman) *can* be cooled by fear of consequences.

The discovery that conception can be controlled by mechanical means was the essential step to sex freedom for women and, through their liberation, for men.

## CHAPTER VIII

### “ QUEEN’S WOMEN ”

“ I am firmly persuaded that, on an average, the proportion between virtue and knowledge is more upon a par than is commonly granted.”

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT (1792).

“ There is some knowledge which it is a praise not to know.”

HANNAH MORE (1819).

DURING the eighteen-fifties medical men began to realise for the first time the seriousness of syphilis. Syphilis, unlike smallpox and such quick-acting fevers, does not slay instantly. It appears, and seems to disappear, but unless the victim has prompt, correct, and prolonged treatment, it never completely leaves the system, and its continued presence is indicated by the development of apparently unrelated diseases of destructive and debilitating character. Sir William Jenner, Physician in Ordinary to Queen Victoria and the Prince of Wales, in the course of evidence before a Select Committee appointed in 1868 to enquire into the working of the Contagious Diseases Acts, said that only within the previous ten or fifteen years had physicians come to appreciate that such chronic illnesses as bronchitis, Bright’s disease, and various diseases of the spleen were frequently syphilitic in

## “QUEEN’S WOMEN”

origin, and might develop years after the disease itself appeared to have been cured. A particular case mentioned during the enquiry was that of a paralysed man who proved to have had syphilis twelve years previously : treatment for the original disease cured the resulting one ; in another case quoted a patient suffering from a sore tongue had had no other syphilitic symptoms for twenty-four years. Jenner also spoke of the effect on the second generation ; and remarked that though medical men could not yet say with certainty whether diseases due to syphilitic heredity were transmissible to third and later generations, they were strongly of opinion that they were. He mentioned the case of a girl of fourteen who had disease of the liver and of the eye—“a poor miserable child for life, because her parents had syphilis. Ten years ago, certainly fifteen years ago, no one would have supposed these diseases to be syphilitic ; now there is not a shadow of doubt about it.”

The growing realisation of the far-reaching effects of syphilis caused something like a panic in army medical circles, for there was a slightly fluctuating, but very serious and continual incidence of sickness from venereal diseases in regiments stationed at home. In 1860, for instance, 146 per thousand of the men at fourteen stations afterwards brought under the Contagious Diseases Act of 1864 were admitted to hospital suffering from primary syphilis ; while admissions for secondary syphilis in the same year were 32.73 per thousand. In 1862 a Departmental

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

Committee made an enquiry into the subject, and on their recommendation a government bill was passed expeditiously through both Houses of Parliament with scarcely any discussion. Under this act, the police in certain specified towns were given power to call upon a woman from whom a soldier alleged that he had contracted venereal disease to come up for surgical examination. Should she refuse, the police could get an order from a magistrate compelling her to undergo examination. If she proved to be diseased, she was compelled to go into hospital for treatment.

A few weeks after this act was passed, but before it came into operation, the Secretary of State for War and the Board of Admiralty appointed a committee of eminent medical men to enquire into the best mode of diminishing the incidence of venereal disease in the army and navy. This committee reported in February, 1866, and recommended the introduction of periodical medical examination of every "common prostitute" within prescribed areas. It added, "However efficiently the regulations as regards women may be carried out, their success in arresting the spread of disease must be very imperfect unless similar precautions be adopted for preventing the men from carrying infection to the women. . . . The practice of periodical examination of all soldiers exposed to venereal contagion was general throughout the army prior to the year 1859. . . . The Committee are of opinion that the practice, so far as the soldier is concerned, should be universal throughout the army,

## “ QUEEN’S WOMEN ”

and that it is no less necessary to the health of the sailor whenever he has the opportunity of access to women ; without such a regulation, the proposed periodical examination of women must lose half its value.” In consequence of this report, a second act was passed in 1866, with scarcely a breath of opposition in Parliament. It repealed the former act, and introduced the principle of periodical examination of prostitutes, but entirely ignored the committee’s recommendation of the restoration of medical examination of men in the services : which, so far as the army was concerned, had been abrogated in 1859 on the recommendation of a committee presided over by Lord Herbert because it was said to offend the modesty of the men, and, so far as the navy was concerned, had never existed. The government and Parliament were in agreement with the sentiments of the Royal Commissioners who were called together in 1871 to give further consideration to these acts, and stated in their report : “ We may at once dispose of this recommendation so far as it is founded on the principle of putting both parties to the sin of fornication on the same footing by the obvious but not less conclusive reply that there is no comparison to be made between prostitutes and the men who consort with them. With the one sex the offence is committed as a matter of gain ; with the other it is an irregular indulgence of a natural impulse.” With which curiously muddled moral pronouncement the commissioners disposed of the recommendation made on purely medical grounds

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

by the medical committee. Under the act of 1866, in certain specified areas the police were empowered to invite any woman they considered a common prostitute to sign a submission agreeing to come up for regular medical examination. If she signed voluntarily, and was found to be free from disease, she was registered and given a card instructing her to present herself once a fortnight for a medical examination by the police surgeon. In the event of her refusing, the police could bring her before a magistrate who, if he were convinced of the truth of their contention (and in no case do they appear to have failed to carry conviction), could order her to be examined and registered. Women found to be diseased were sent to hospital, where efforts were made to cure them morally as well as physically—the Christian advocates of the acts made great play with the clause inserted in the act of 1866 under which no hospital could be certified for the reception of registered prostitutes “unless at the time of the granting of a certificate adequate provision is made for the moral and religious instruction of the women detained therein under the act.”

The women who came within the operation of the acts were, almost without exception, uneducated and untrained, and in many cases were below normal mentally. They could rarely read or write ; they were frequently illegitimate and, after a neglected childhood, had entered the prostitute's trade as soon as they entered their teens, and possibly before. They had

## “QUEEN’S WOMEN”

little if any sense of responsibility. Mr. T. Woollcombe, the doctor in charge of the hospital for venereal diseases certified under the acts at Devonport (and named after the Prince Consort), stated that the women who came under his charge were obedient, civil and respectful. Treated kindly, they were extraordinarily amenable ; treated roughly, they “would break out and there would not be a sound window in the place.” He was of opinion that few of them were what he would call “radically bad”—they were entirely creatures of impulse, with a great disposition to help and to be kind to one another. He confirmed the assertions of other medical men who had had charge of them, that when a ship came in or a new regiment arrived, he had trouble with them until the act of 1866 gave powers of compulsory detention : “but we generally got over it by giving them some tea or amusement.”

It is not undiverting to read in the evidence given before the various committees and commissions the fine distinction drawn by witnesses between the card given to registered English prostitutes and the infamous certificate issued to registered prostitutes on the immoral Continent. In form, even in intent, the two things may have been different ; but in practice, the possession of one of these cards was invaluable—it was regarded as evidence of a woman’s health by civilian as well as by naval or military clients, and many of the women who possessed them regarded these bits of paper as conferring on them a special status : they

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

called themselves "Queen's women" because, they said, they were kept clean by the government for the benefit of the Queen's soldiers.

It seems difficult to believe that an act involving such possibilities of victimisation and maladministration should have been passed with such slight consideration by the House of Commons. It meant that no working woman in the towns brought under the act was safe from the possibility of victimisation. It made all normal friendly intercourse between the soldiers quartered in a district and its inhabitants a social risk to the women with whom they came in contact. A panic measure designed to reduce the dangers run by young soldiers had, in fact, a reasonable chance of increasing those dangers by making it more difficult for them to associate with the respectable young women of a town and thus driving them into the company of the non-respectable.

The select Committee of the House of Lords set up in 1868 to enquire into the working of the act reported in favour of extension. A Select Committee of the House of Commons reported in a similar sense in the following year, and another act was passed in 1869, extending the operation of the act of 1866 to further areas. At about the same time, an association with numerous branches was formed with the object of extending the operation of the acts to suitable civilian areas. There is no doubt that both army and civilian circles were thoroughly scared. Army medical witnesses who appeared before the Lords Committee of

## “ QUEEN’S WOMEN ”

1868 attributed a large part of the illnesses, such as consumption, by which many soldiers on home service were incapacitated, to the lowering of their vitality by syphilis, even where the illness was not directly traceable to that disease ; while Dr. William Acton testified from records he had kept that in 1849 nearly 50 per cent. and in 1854 43 per cent. of the out-patients attending St. Bartholomew’s Hospital were suffering from venereal diseases, and Mr. Prescott Hewett, Senior Surgeon at St. George’s Hospital, stated that during the thirteen years he was assistant surgeon he had seen on an average 240 out-patients a week, and 25 per cent. of them were syphilis cases.

The whole thing was like a nightmare. No man who sought extra-conjugal experience in days when such experience could only be bought could feel himself safe, since medical practitioners were emphatic that the dressmaker by day whose respectability appeared to offer security to her employer by night was as potent a carrier of disease as the “ common prostitute.” How many, one wonders, of the nameless and obscure maladies which rendered middle-class men’s wives and daughters ailing, and sometimes permanently invalided, were due to venereal infection, by contact or inheritance. Ignorance combined with fear of social exposure led men to conceal or ignore their symptoms. Their wives and children suffered. Before the committee of 1868, the case was mentioned of a butcher’s wife who had never been with any man but her husband and gave birth to one stillborn

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

and eight syphilitic children, four of whom died in infancy, in the course of seventeen years. It was not isolated. Wives without status had no remedy against husbands who diseased them, even if they realised what had happened : which they were often not in a position to do. The Lord moved in mysterious ways, and if he had seen fit to burden them with pains and sores and discharges, it was his will and must be borne.

Parliament had passed the first Contagious Diseases Act without consideration. Panic-ridden committees had endorsed the act and recommended its extension. Parliament had responded by extending it. These proceedings took up little space in the newspapers. Ignorance as to the existence and working of the acts was widespread, but it was not complete. Daniel Cooper, secretary of the Rescue Society, issued a pamphlet and wrote to thousands of clergy, public men, and philanthropists calling on them to protest against the passing of the act of 1869. Numerous doctors were against the acts, and so were a fair proportion of army men. Intelligent men who understood the acts, and the evil they were designed to counteract, realised that they were at least as likely to extend venereal disease as to diminish it. The medical examination of prostitutes tended to give a sense of security to the men consorting with them—a sense of false security, as the continued high incidence of venereal diseases in the army showed. But the

## “ QUEEN’S WOMEN ”

obscure protests of opponents of the acts went unheeded, until in 1869, Josephine Butler was persuaded by a group of doctors to take up the struggle for their repeal. Her work for the higher education of women was described in Chapter V. Her work for the elevation and emancipation of the most defenceless among women, which earned her opprobrium in her own time, is more vividly remembered to-day.

The first years of her married life were spent at Oxford, where her health suffered severely from the unhealthiness of the city in winter: in those days, it was surrounded by floods for several months of the year, and the retiring waters left behind an unhealthy atmosphere that affected all but the strongest constitutions. Her husband obtained an appointment at Cheltenham, and while there they experienced a cruel loss: their only daughter was killed by falling over the banisters to the stone floor below when running to meet her parents. In the following year, Mr. Butler was appointed Principal of Liverpool College, and they were able to escape from the scene of their sorrow. But Mrs. Butler’s heart was still oppressed with her loss: “I suffered much during the first months in our new home,” she wrote in her recollections. “Music, art, reading, all failed as resources to alleviate or to interest. I became possessed with an irresistible desire to go forth and find some pain keener than my own—to meet with people more unhappy than myself (for I knew there

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

were thousands of such). I did not exaggerate my own trial ; I only knew that my heart ached night and day, and that the only solace possible would seem to be to find other hearts which ached night and day, and with more reason than mine."

In a great seaport town like Liverpool she had not far to seek for misery. She found it, and solace, in work among the outcast women who sought refuge in the pauper hospital. She did more than go among them and pray with them : with her husband's full concurrence, she took them, as many as five at a time, into her own home, and nursed them back to health, or to a death less sordid than had seemed to await them. The call upon her hospitality became so insistent that she and her husband took a house near their own and opened it as a House of Rest. Ultimately, some twenty years later, it became a Hospital for Incurables, supported by the town. Then, encouraged by financial aid from friends, they took a larger house and made it into an industrial home where poor and friendless girls who might have fallen into prostitution were taught occupations that gave them a better chance of escaping the outcast's lot.

By the contacts she thus made with the most miserable of the great city's inhabitants, Mrs. Butler was confirmed in what she, as a compassionate and loving woman, had sensed, that these "bad" women were for the most part no worse than other women ; that they were, indeed, as they were sometimes called,

## “QUEEN’S WOMEN”

“unfortunates” whose lives had been made too hard for them, and whose youth and ignorance had too often been ruthlessly exploited.

These events happened in 1865. A year later, Mrs. Butler relates, she was among the few who read “that very brief debate on the second Contagious Diseases Act when Mr. Henley and Mr. Ayrton alone, but clearly and boldly, entered their protest.” She had a sort of foreboding that she was to be brought more closely into touch with what she felt was a system degrading to the men on whose behalf it was introduced, but infinitely more degrading and demoralising to the wretched and defenceless women against whom it was to be enforced—a system, moreover, that meant a potential loss of liberty and status to all women through the loss of liberty and status to the least of women. Then, in 1869, she was asked to take up the cause of repeal by the little group of doctors who had striven in vain to draw public attention to the system and its evil effects. They felt that only women could waken the public to a realisation of all that was implied in this attack on women. She would have avoided the call if she had felt it possible to do so; but her conscience would not let her rest. Here, it seemed, in this hard, distasteful task was the answer to the prayers she had uttered since girlhood that she might be of service to her own oppressed sex.

It is not easy for us to-day to realise what heroism there was in her decision to associate herself publicly

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

with those who were working for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. She was a lady by birth and upbringing. She was the wife of a man in a responsible position in the world of education. She was the mother of growing sons. All the conventions of her time and her social position were against the step she was about to take. Ladies were required to have no knowledge of the causes and effects, even of the existence, of prostitution. That there were "fallen women" she, as a clergyman's wife, could scarcely escape knowing. But that she should regard them with anything but righteous horror, that she should think of them as beings with feelings and rights like those of respectable women was in itself enough to condemn her in the eyes of most. That she went still farther and spoke and agitated in public for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts meant damage to the prestige that was naturally hers, and involved serious danger to her husband's own standing. But this fortunate pair saw eye to eye in all the important things of their lives, and when a course of action seemed to them right, they were prepared to pursue it undaunted, whatever the reaction on their social position. Just as her husband had approved of the practical assistance she had held out to individual unfortunate women, he now approved fully of the public action she proposed to take.

Her first step in the campaign was to take the train to Crewe, and speak to the men employed in the locomotive factories there. The women who came

## “QUEEN’S WOMEN”

within the scope of the acts were working women. Therefore it was to working men that she made her first appeals. She went from one manufacturing town of the North to another. Everywhere her message was received with the enthusiasm of indignation, and her visits were followed by protest meetings organised by local leaders of the workers.

In this same year, 1869, various medical men and clergy brought up the subject at the Social Science Congress, with the result that the National Anti-Contagious Diseases Acts Association was formed. Shortly afterwards, the Ladies’ National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts came into being, with Mrs. Butler as President ; and gentle, unpretentious women like W. T. Stead’s earnest and simple mother went about collecting signatures against the acts, causing Daniel Cooper to remark that “the ladies of England will save the country from this fearful curse.” On New Year’s Day, 1870, “The Daily News” published a solemn protest composed by Harriet Martineau, then nearly seventy years of age. Josephine Butler was, naturally, among the hundred and twenty signatories, and so was Florence Nightingale. This protest alleged that the acts were an infringement of the acknowledged liberties of the subject ; that they were unjust in that they “punish the sex who are the victims of a vice, and leave unpunished the sex who are the main cause both of the vice and its dreaded consequences” ; and that they did nothing to improve morality. To it some two thousand

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

women, including a great many prominent members of the Society of Friends, ultimately appended their names.

But women had no votes, and working men had scarcely begun to exercise theirs. The Government was not prepared to be influenced in this matter by either of these sections of the community.

The agitation continued, however, Mrs. Butler travelling nearly four thousand miles to address meetings all over the country in the course of the first six months of 1870. Towards the end of that year, there was a by-election at Colchester, one of the towns placed under the operation of the acts from their inception. The Government candidate was Sir Henry Storks, who had been one of the principal witnesses before the Lords Committee of 1868. Storks had served in the Crimean war, where he had been in charge of the British establishment in Turkey. At the end of the war, he had superintended the final withdrawal of the British from Turkey. In 1859 he was appointed High Commissioner of the Ionian Islands—he was the last man to hold this appointment, as the islands were restored to Greece in 1863. From the Ionian Islands, he was transferred to the governorship of Malta ; and from Malta he was sent to Jamaica on a special mission of enquiry into the administration of that island, where the measures taken to put down a negro rising had excited controversy at home. Governor Eyre was recalled (and afterwards exonerated), and Storks was appointed in his stead.

## “QUEEN’S WOMEN”

In 1867 Storks came home, and was made controller-in-chief and under-secretary at the War Office. In 1870, the title of controller-in-chief was abolished, and that of surveyor-general of ordnance, to which office Storks was appointed, was substituted. The Government wanted to have him in the House of Commons. When, therefore, Mr. Rebow, Liberal member for Colchester, died, Storks was sent down to contest what was regarded as a safe Liberal seat. But Storks by his evidence before the Lords Committee had incurred the bitter hatred of the opponents of the acts. He had proved himself a realist. His interest was to maintain the health and efficiency of the army. He was not concerned with the moral aspect, with the question of whether fornication was a sin. He knew it was a fact, and that unmarried soldiers, with few exceptions, needed women. He wanted them to have healthy women, and he believed that periodical examination of prostitutes was a step towards keeping them healthy. But, like the medical experts of 1864, he was emphatically in favour of the regular examination of the men, married and single ; he went even further, and added that if he had his way soldiers’ wives should be examined too, since they were many of them victims of disease, conveyed to them by their husbands. It was this last recommendation of his that excited the most furious hostility—and apparently, half a century after the excitement of the controversy has died away, still does ; for in a short life of Josephine Butler published by the Society for the

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

Propagation of Christian Knowledge in 1922, he is reported to have said, "Not only prostitutes, but soldiers' wives, ought to be examined": there is no reference whatever to his insistence on the concurrent necessity of examining the men.

Storks was, therefore, not only a candidate who would support the Government that kept the acts in operation: he was also in a special way an opponent to be fought by the Anti-Contagious Diseases Acts crusaders. Mrs. Butler and a number of her supporters, including James Stuart, came to the town. Mrs. Butler was refused a bed in one hotel after another, so great was the fear of their proprietors that their establishments would be broken up, if she was known to be in them, by the rough elements that had been incited by certain citizens interested in the maintenance of the acts to intimidate the acts' opponents. But in spite of rowdyism and much heaving of benches and brickbats, the crusaders succeeded in their object and secured the defeat of Storks by 1363 votes to 853.

Such successes, and the association had others, raised the hopes of the crusaders; but their goal—repeal—was still a good many years ahead. At the Church Congress of 1871, Mr. Butler attempted to read a carefully worded paper on the subject. He was howled down: "We had heard, many times before, rude and defiant cries and noisy opposition at crowded meetings," wrote Mrs. Butler of the occasion, "but never so deep and angry a howl as now arose

## “QUEEN’S WOMEN”

from the throats of a portion of the clergy of the National Church. . . . I recall vividly my husband’s attitude while the tumult lasted. . . . His expression was one of firmness and gentleness combined. Inwardly, I can imagine, he recognised the humorous aspect of this burst of wrath, for he was very quick in discerning any humorous element in the vagaries of human beings.”

In 1872, the Government introduced a bill to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts, but authorising the detention beyond the term of their sentences of diseased *women* prisoners for treatment until cured. This compromise satisfied no one, and was dropped. The campaign continued—more than two hundred and fifty public meetings were held during the next year.

Mr. Gladstone’s first government went out of office in 1874. Among his ministers had been James Stansfeld, the Radical member for Halifax. Stansfeld had a knack of supporting unpopular causes. His abilities would have entitled him to high office long before he attained it—he was fifty-one when, after holding a variety of junior appointments, he was made first President of the Local Government Board, with a seat in the Cabinet. His friendship with Mazzini, which began when he was twenty-seven, led him to take a strong interest in the struggle that was going on at many points in Europe for national liberty. This in itself was against his success in public life; and when in 1864 the French Government accused him of complicity in a conspiracy against Napoleon III, his

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

career suffered a serious setback. Ten years later, he seemed to have conquered recognition. But once more he chose to support an unpopular cause, with the certain knowledge that he faced worldly failure in so doing. He had been opposed to the Contagious Diseases Acts while in office, but had been precluded by his official position from taking an active part in the campaign against them. He now came forward and spoke publicly on the side of the crusaders at a large meeting at Bristol. The newspapers were full of his speech and his amazing action next day ; the accession of an ex-Cabinet Minister to their ranks won the crusaders at least a momentary hearing in the press.

Stansfeld kept his seat for Halifax, and his presence in Parliament was invaluable to the opponents of the acts. Repeal bills were introduced in 1875, '76, '77 and '78, but were each time defeated on second reading. A further select committee was appointed in 1879, with Stansfeld as one of its members. He himself had strong views on the moral aspects of the matter ; but in his capacity as a member of this committee of enquiry he set himself to demonstrate the uselessness of the acts on the very grounds that caused their supporters to advocate them. By his carefully constructed, persistent questions he elicited replies from witnesses strongly in favour of the acts showing that, so far as there was any real or apparent improvement in the health of the army from the point of view of venereal diseases, it could equally well

## “QUEEN’S WOMEN”

be credited to other causes : one of the most potent of which had been the order made by Lord Cardwell in 1873 (and abandoned in 1879) by which men going sick of primary syphilis, gonorrhœa, or delirium tremens had their pay stopped. This order resulted the next week after it was put into force in a drop of between one-half and one-third in the admissions to hospital for venereal diseases. But in 1875, the admissions for secondary syphilis were higher than they had been for six years previously.

Stansfeld went also into the contention of the supporters of the acts that they had improved the health, appearance, and cleanliness of the prostitutes. That the number of registered prostitutes decreased was an undoubted fact; but Stansfeld brought out that the percentage detained in hospital increased as the number carrying on the trade decreased, and drew from Dr. John Coleman Barr, the Medical Officer of the Lock Hospital at Aldershot, the several admissions that the reduced number of prostitutes led to what Stansfeld termed “excessive user” of those who remained, with a consequent increased danger of “mediate contagion” conveyed by a prostitute who might be free from disease herself, but would pass it from one client to another ; and a wider dissemination of any disease contracted by a prostitute between examinations. As regards the alleged increased cleanliness and sense of decency of the women brought up for examination, Stansfeld elicited that during the ten years Dr. Barr had held his post at

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

Aldershot, on the one hand the conditions in which these unfortunate women were able to lodge had much improved, and were therefore in any case conducive to greater cleanliness ; and on the other that the average age of the women had tended to increase, which would lead to the conclusion that they became hardened to a life from which they found it more difficult to escape since recognition of their status had come with compulsory registration. The witnesses he interrogated were hard put to it to evade Stansfeld's suggestion that, though their increased cleanliness was, no doubt, as advocates of the acts insisted, good for the comfort and self-respect of the women, it was also calculated to make them more attractive, and therefore to increase sexual indulgence by the men, and consequently their risk of exposure to disease. Two interesting facts that transpired from his questioning were that the incidence of syphilis in two regiments stationed side by side at the same time at Aldershot was 23 per thousand in one and 142 per thousand in the other ; and that the incidence of disease was affected by " the gregarious habits of the men " which induced those of one regiment to consort with a limited number of women. The Committee continued its sessions until 1882, when it issued a report. To almost every one of its clauses the members agreed and disagreed in differing proportions. In its recommendations, it sat firmly on the fence : it could not recommend the repeal of the acts because it had come to the conclusion that

## “ QUEEN’S WOMEN ”

feeling in the subjected stations was in favour of their continuance. But neither could it recommend their extension : “ Your Committee cannot, having regard to the character, rather than to the extent of opinion hostile to the acts recommend their extension. . . . The ground on which your Committee decline to recommend extension is that the public opinion of a part of the community which it would be unwise and unjust to neglect, is unprepared for such a step. But this does not apply to the districts where the system is in operation. There the Acts are, on the whole, approved of and their repeal would be a subject of regret. Besides, while it seems to your Committee to be the duty of Parliament to abstain from any step calculated to wound the conscientious religious convictions of a considerable body of people, it would be unfair to soldiers and sailors, and unwise from the point of view of the efficiency of the service, to abolish a system which in localities favourable to its maintenance has been found effective for rescuing men of both services from diseases to which they are specially exposed.” It further recommended the institution in unsubjected districts of *female* lock hospitals (my italics).

Stansfeld drafted an alternative report the conclusions of which were diametrically opposed to the report obtained by a majority vote, clause by clause. When one reads his careful, well-directed, apposite questioning which fell with hammer-like precision until it produced the requisite spark from the brains of the

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

persons he was interrogating, and contrasts it with the woolliness not only of many of the witnesses, but of most of the other members of the committee, one is convinced that he elicited the truth of the matter, and that, successful as regular compulsory examination of the entire population might be in eliminating venereal disease (provided no one was ever allowed to enter the country without also undergoing examination), such legislation as the Contagious Diseases Acts is utterly useless, even on behalf of the soldiers and sailors for whose benefit it was passed.

In the following year Stansfeld moved a resolution in the House of Commons condemning compulsory examination. It was carried by 182 votes to 110. The acts were immediately suspended. Two years later, a petition for their repeal, signed by two hundred members of Parliament on both sides of the House, was handed to the Cabinet (the votes of working men were beginning to have importance), and in April, 1886, the acts were at last repealed.

The campaign to remove the Contagious Diseases Acts from the statute book had quite as important secondary as primary results. By seventeen years of persistent endeavour, the crusaders secured their primary object—the repeal of the acts. They also, by forcing intelligent men like James Stansfeld and the Rev. F. D. Maurice to study a distasteful subject intelligently, succeeded in bringing the system these acts represented into disrepute. But, most important

## “ QUEEN’S WOMEN ”

of all, they opened the eyes at least of the politically active among the general public to the actualities of life below the surface. Thousands of women in Josephine Butler’s day did not know even of the existence of prostitution. Her fearless courage in mounting the public platform and denouncing the Government for conniving at a degrading system by attempting to regulate it brought knowledge of it to ears that would otherwise never have heard of it. She, a woman of gentle upbringing, dared to address public meetings on a subject that was taboo in public even among men. Her action inevitably attracted widespread attention. It did not matter that she was misrepresented, that she was accused of being without womanliness—a quality she actually possessed almost to excess. It did not matter that, carried away by moral indignation, she frequently asserted as facts particular incidents which, under cold-blooded examination, she was unable to substantiate. It was possible to confound her, and most of her supporters, over the accuracy of individual cases ; but what no one could deny was that prostitution of a peculiarly unsavoury kind did exist in all large towns ; that girls rarely entered the trade with intent, but generally drifted into it through circumstances outside their control. Lack of parental care, actual parental misdeeds were responsible for the prostitution of many of the children found in the ranks of the “unfortunate.” Some came from “homes” where whole families lived in one room, and had been abused in the first place by their

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

own fathers. Others, usually illegitimate, had been pushed into the business by their own mothers. Older girls had usually gone on the streets from sheer want, because their complete lack of training made it impossible for them to secure any kind of respectable employment.

The publicity the Anti-Contagious Diseases Acts campaign gave to such facts as these was of inestimable value, both to public and private morality. Mr. Miller, the Portsmouth undertaker whose job it was to bury pauper prostitutes, was emphatic on this point: he gave it as his opinion before the Royal Commission of 1871 that Mrs. Butler, by promoting meetings, had directed attention to the acts and their operation—"they have done a wonderful deal of harm, and made people aware of things they would not have known at all if it had been kept quiet." He was right: these things could no longer be kept quiet. No man or woman interested in public affairs could continue to be blind to the existence of prostitution, to the ravages of disease due to prostitution, to the evil that resulted from a different standard of sexual morality for men and for women. The majority of the men and women who took an active part in the campaign were actuated by religious faith, by the simple conviction that any sexual act committed without the blessing of the church was a sin. Their demand for a single standard of sex behaviour for men and women set many people in the way of considering the foundations of sexual ethics. In the face of insistence

## “ QUEEN’S WOMEN ”

such as Mrs. Butler’s on the essential humanity of even the most degraded among the unfortunate creatures she had personally ministered to, it was difficult for the most careless of thoughtful men to maintain the attitude that the prostitute was a dehumanised being whose existence was necessary for the safety of her more fortunate sisters. “ You know very well that many young men go through two or three years of profligacy or, as it is mildly expressed when applied to men, sow their wild oats,” said Mrs. Butler to the Royal Commission of 1871, “ and it is exactly the same with these women ; and yet you never hear anyone say, ‘ Have you found any conscience in these men or are they entirely unhumanised ; have they any spark of modesty or manliness left ? ’ I never heard that question asked, and it seems to me strange to ask it about women. If it applies to women, it applies equally to men.”

That which had been taken for granted—the chastity demanded of women, the unchastity palliated in men —began to be questioned, and the questioning thus initiated has not yet been silenced or satisfied.

Most of the crusaders would have agreed with Mr. Solly, one of the council of the College of Surgeons, when he said that “ far from considering syphilis an evil, he regarded it, on the contrary, as a blessing. . . . Could the disease be exterminated, which he hoped it could not, fornication would ride rampant through the land.” Most of them were at one with Mrs. Butler in considering it “ a mischief to meddle with ” venereal

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

disease at all. Few, perhaps, even of the crusaders would have gone so far as she did and denied the desirability of preventing diseased parents from passing on the disease to their children. "It is the law of nature that children should suffer for the sins of their parents," she declared, "and I do not think we can venture by legislative measures to interfere with that law." One hopes that this harsh insistence on a biblical text was the result of an answer given too quickly to an unexpected question. But if most of the campaigners felt that venereal diseases were sent by God as a punishment and a deterrent, there were others outside the campaign less inclined to allow them to take their course, and claim the innocent with the guilty as their victims. "I have arrived at the conclusion that syphilis is one of the most fatal diseases that we have in this country," said Sir William Jenner in 1868. "Again, I think that it is a disease entirely preventible. I think that children and other persons suffer largely from it without any sin of their own, and therefore I think it ought to be prevented." He was not alone in the humanity (and common sense) of his attitude. Other physicians, other men and women in public and in private life, were urged by knowledge they could no longer escape into activity aiming at the reduction, the elimination of this scourge. The shame that still surrounded all sexual matters still enveloped in its stifling folds the diseases that sprang from commercialised sex relationships ; but some at least of the men and women of the nation were

## “ QUEEN’S WOMEN ”

led by the hidden vileness brought to light through the Anti-Contagious Diseases Acts campaign to combat these shames, and to press for the enlightenment of the young as to the dangers they ran, and the urgent duty of anyone unfortunate enough to contract disease to seek care and cure.

## CHAPTER IX

### MORE LIGHT ON DARK PLACES

“The ignorance of these girls is almost incredible. It is one of the greatest scandals of Protestant training that parents are allowed to keep their children in total ignorance of the simplest truths of physiology, without even a rudimentary conception of the nature of sexual morality.”

W. T. STEAD (1885).

OF all the shocking facts that came to light through the enactment of the Contagious Diseases Acts and the campaign for their repeal, none perhaps was more horrible than the youth of some of the “women” engaged in prostitution. The age of consent was twelve, and children of that age were actually put on the register under the acts. “At present for the purpose of seduction, and of seduction only, our law declares every female child a woman at twelve years of age,” said Mrs. Butler before the Royal Commission of 1871, and added, “I am ashamed to have to confess to such a shameful state of the law before you gentlemen; but a child is a woman, for that purpose alone, at twelve years of age.”

The Commissioners were also struck by the deficiency of the law for the protection of female children. At the time of their report, “carnal know-

## MORE LIGHT ON DARK PLACES

ledge" of a girl between ten and twelve years of age was a misdemeanour punishable with three years' penal servitude; and an indecent assault upon a child of that age was punishable with two years' penal servitude. For the child of twelve and over, there was no protection in the law. "We think," reported the Commissioners, "a child of twelve years can hardly be deemed capable of giving consent, and should not have the power of yielding up her person. We therefore recommend the absolute protection of female children to the age of fourteen years, making the age of consent to commence at fourteen instead of twelve years, as under the existing law."

But nothing was done until, in 1881, such publicity was given to a series of cases of girls who appeared to have been decoyed abroad for service in the brothels of Brussels that a Select Committee of the House of Lords was called together, to enquire into the law relating to the protection of young girls. In the course of the evidence, it became fairly clear that the particular girls whose cases had excited comment had not, in the fullest sense, been decoyed away. They had already had some experience of prostitution, and were not averse to continuing that occupation in a place where, it was represented to them, they would find it more lucrative. But what did come out before the committee was that they had no realisation of the sort of life—the virtual imprisonment in a brothel—to which they were going, of the registration and examination to which they would have to submit, and

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

of the complete lack of control they would have over their earnings. They had not been decoyed from virtue to prostitution, but they had certainly been victims of false pretences.

Another interesting thing that came out in the evidence was that it was the habit of the procurers engaged in this trade of exporting young girls to provide their victims with birth certificates properly belonging to others : girls under twenty-one were not eligible for inscription on the police registers of Brussels. The Brussels police, moreover, demanded the production of a birth certificate. But nothing was easier than to procure a genuine birth certificate from Somerset House relating to some other girl of suitable age, and pass it off as that of one of the ignorant girls about to be launched into a new way of life.

Revelations, too, of the prevalence of child prostitution in London were made by Mr. (afterwards Sir) Howard Vincent, Director of Criminal Investigations, and others. Mr. Vincent stated, "There are houses in London, in many parts of London, where there are people who will procure children for the purpose of immorality and prostitution without any difficulty whatsoever above the age of thirteen, children without number at fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen years of age. . . . This prostitution actually takes place with the knowledge and connivance of the mother and to the profit of the household." Over solicitation in the streets by children after they reached the age of thirteen, the police had no special power

## MORE LIGHT ON DARK PLACES

whatever. Superintendent Dunlap, of the C Division of the Metropolitan Police, which covered the St. James's district, testified that there had been a great increase in his division in the two years preceding the holding of the committee in the prostitution of very young children—little girls between twelve and fifteen, and he went on : “ There is a low description of brothel in my division where the children go. I had a warrant to execute a short time ago, to arrest some brothel-keepers, and I went with my chief inspector, and in each of the rooms in that house I found an elderly gentleman in bed with two of these children. . . . They were to receive six shillings each from the gentleman, two of them ; and the gentleman had paid six shillings each for the room. It was four shillings if there was only one girl, but six shillings if there were two girls for the room.”

The committee reported in favour of raising the age of consent to sixteen, and of tightening up the law generally for the protection of young girls, especially with a view to preventing their abduction abroad.

Under the auspices of Lord Shaftesbury, who had already been instrumental in getting passed legislation to ameliorate the lot of factory workers and to forbid the employment of small boys as chimney-sweeps, a Criminal Law Amendment Bill was drafted on the lines suggested by the Select Committee’s report. In 1884 it was passed through the House of Lords. It failed to get beyond a second reading in the House of

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

Commons, despite the fact that the Select Committee of that House appointed in 1879 to give further consideration to the working of the Contagious Diseases Acts had included a paragraph in its majority report, published in 1882, in which it recommended "that it should be a misdemeanour for any person to receive into any house or into or on any premises occupied or possessed by him or of which he has the management or control, any girl under the age of sixteen years for the purpose of her having unlawful sexual intercourse with any person, whether such intercourse is intended with any particular man or generally."

In 1885 the bill again passed the Lords ; and again it hung fire in the Commons. A change of government made the bill's chances of passing the lower House highly improbable.

Those who were anxious to secure the passage of the bill—among whom were Mrs. Butler and the City Chamberlain, seventy-five-year-old Mr. Benjamin Scott (who was also chairman of the Committee for the Suppression of the Traffic in Girls)—were in despair, and cast about for some editor bold enough to publish the facts relating to child prostitution and the buying and selling of little girls of twelve and upwards that went on daily in the city of London. They went to W. T. Stead, then editor of the "Pall Mall Gazette." His mother, it will be remembered, had been among the devoted ladies who had collected signatures for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. Stead himself, at this time a man of thirty-six

## MORE LIGHT ON DARK PLACES

and only five years established in London journalism, had been a “vehement supporter” of Mrs. Butler in her campaign. “I am ready to allow anybody to discuss anything in any newspaper I edit,” he himself wrote, “but one thing I have never allowed them to do and that is to say a word in favour of the Contagious Diseases Acts.” Stead was obviously the man to help the supporters of the Criminal Law Amendment Bill, if anyone would. But even he hesitated. The details he would have to print would be exceedingly ugly. The subject was taboo in the press. A newspaper editor cannot consider only his own inclinations—there are his backers to consider also. He cannot afford to run the risk of alienating a large section of his public, even if he is prepared to risk his own position, unless he is very firmly convinced that the step he proposes to take is sufficiently for the public good to be worth the risk. Stead’s first step was to make private enquiries through a friend who was in the Cabinet as to the likelihood of the bill’s being taken up by the new Government and passed through the House of Commons. He was assured that there was absolutely no chance of this happening. He then went to Mr. Howard Vincent, Director of Criminal Investigations, to discover whether in his opinion there was any truth in the assertion that had been made to him, that a child of thirteen could be bought without difficulty from her parents for purposes of prostitution in the Christian city of London. Mr. Vincent, whose evidence before the select Committee

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

of the Lords that had gone into the matter of the law relating to young girls has already been quoted, naturally confirmed the assertion. Stead thus recounts part of their conversation : “ ‘Why,’ I exclaimed, ‘ the very thought is enough to raise hell.’ ‘ It is true,’ he said, ‘ and although it ought to raise hell, it does not even raise the neighbours.’ ”

Stead made up his mind to act. He got together a small group of people willing to go personally into the matter with him. They made their investigations, and he drew up a report of the actual conditions they discovered. On Saturday, 4th July, 1885, appeared an announcement on the front page of the “ *Pall Mall Gazette* ” concluding with the words : “ Therefore we say quite frankly to-day that all those who are squeamish, and all those who are prudish, and all those who prefer to live in a fool’s paradise of imaginary innocence and purity, selfishly oblivious of the horrible realities which torment those whose lives are passed in the London inferno *will do well not to read the ‘Pall Mall Gazette’* on Monday and the following three days.” Five pages in each of the issues of the 6th, 7th, and 8th of July were filled with a flamboyant, but factual, statement of what he and his collaborators had done and discovered. The offices of the paper were besieged, and the printers were hard put to it to keep pace with the demand for copies. From much matter written in a highly coloured style, and with an irrelevant insistence on the value of virginity in itself—“ it is the one thing in the

## MORE LIGHT ON DARK PLACES

whole world which, if once lost, can never be recovered, it is the most precious thing a woman ever has," is one phrase of a number—there emerged the undoubted fact that Stead had purchased nine girls between the ages of fourteen and eighteen within ten days ; that four of them were certified as virgins by a doctor ; and that seven of them signed agreements drawn up by Stead that they were ready to be seduced by anyone when and where he pleased. Their total cost was between £24 and £29. His expenses ran to between £10 and £15. As young virgins were retatable at £10, and sometimes £20 apiece, his transactions would have shown a handsome profit if he had pursued them to the end—as numbers of people in London were daily doing.

On the 9th of July, one page was devoted to a further article, and three pages to correspondence. On the 10th, five pages were devoted to the subject, and one to the Criminal Law Amendment Bill. On the 11th, the only leader, occupying nearly a page, dealt with the same subject, and there were two pages of correspondence. On the 13th, there was a leader, and two pages were filled with a dissection of the Criminal Law Amendment Bill and a demonstration of the points at which it needed strengthening to bring certain of the activities Stead had encountered within the law, as it was intended they should be brought. On the 14th, a leader and a full-page article continued the siege of the Government.

But the Government had already capitulated.

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

Stead's action brought down on his head the wrath of many of his regular readers, who protested that they could not allow in their chaste homes a paper in which such "filth" was published. It also involved him in trouble with his proprietors. But it secured the immediate passage of a much strengthened Criminal Law Amendment Act. "It was," said Stead, "one of the greatest achievements which any journalist single-handed had ever accomplished in the coercion of an unwilling legislature and a reluctant Ministry."

But the matter did not end there. Pleased as the majority of the public presumably were at the greater protection afforded their daughters by the new act, there were some to whom it was highly unpalatable; and when it was discovered that in the case of the first child Stead, in the guise of an immoral man, had purchased, he had failed to obtain the consent of her father, and had omitted to get a receipt from her mother for the money that had passed, and that, moreover, the mother now insisted she had parted with her girl not for purposes of immorality, but that she might go into service, an agitation was set on foot to have Stead brought up under the new act for the abduction of Eliza Armstrong. The Attorney-General was unable to resist the pressure brought to bear on him, and Stead was arrested.

With him were charged Rebecca Jarrett, Bramwell Booth, son of "General" Booth of the Salvation Army, and an elderly journalist named S. Jacques or Mussabini who, said Stead, "had aided me in my

## MORE LIGHT ON DARK PLACES

excursions into regions where he was much more familiar than myself."

The trial for abduction lasted twelve days. Mr. Justice Lopez summed up dead against the prisoners. While telling the jury that they should not allow themselves to be influenced by the articles that had appeared in the "Pall Mall Gazette," he described them as "so filthy and disgusting that one cannot help fearing that they may have suggested to the minds of innocent women and children the existence of vice and wickedness which had never occurred to their minds before." Bramwell Booth and Jacques were acquitted; but after three hours' deliberation the jury found Stead and Rebecca Jarrett guilty. Stead, however, like Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant in the famous birth control case, was exonerated by the jury from blameworthiness, "having been incited by the purest motives." In delivering judgement, the judge remarked, not perhaps without sardonic intent, that he had never before known a jury attend so carefully to a case, and he thought its members should be excused further service for a long time. . . .

A second trial, for alleged indecent assault, arising out of the medical examination of the child, followed before another jury. A second verdict of guilty was returned against Stead and Rebecca Jarrett. On the two charges, Stead was condemned to three, Rebecca Jarrett to six months' imprisonment without hard labour; on the second charge Jacques received one

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

month without hard labour, and a Frenchwoman named Madame Mourey, who actually committed the assault (the others being indicted for aiding and abetting) got six months with hard labour. Stead describes her as a woman of “infamous repute,” and states that she died while in prison.

These trials caused an even greater sensation than the articles in the “Pall Mall Gazette.” It is not often that the editor of a successful paper stands in the dock of the Old Bailey on such a startling charge. For over a fortnight the cases occupied space not in one paper alone, but in every paper. A defence fund was opened, and several thousand pounds were subscribed. Indignation meetings were held all over the country to protest against the sentence, and through the energy of Mr. W. A. Coote, who had been a compositor on the “Standard,” the National Vigilance Association was formed to watch that the new act was put into force in the cases it had been framed to meet. Owing to her friendship with Sir Henry Ponsonby, Queen Victoria’s Private Secretary, Mrs. Fawcett was able to secure for Stead the treatment of a first-class misdemeanant. But he served out his term in prison. It was, he says, “one of the most valuable lessons of my life.”

There were some, no doubt, over whose heads the Anti-Contagious Diseases Acts agitation had passed without their discovering its existence, or the existence of the evils it exposed. But no one could overlook Stead’s “Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon” and

## MORE LIGHT ON DARK PLACES

its aftermath. It did, indeed, as Mr. Justice Lopez lamented, suggest to the minds of innocent and ignorant people the existence of vice and wickedness of which they had never dreamed: the essential first step to the reduction of the evils revealed.

## CHAPTER X

### MAN'S DWINDLING PROPERTY

“A woman who has gained her husband’s heart has gained the only prize on earth for which she cares.”  
“The Athenæum” (1869).

THE opening of the nineteenth century found man in full possession not only of the things that were his by inheritance or his own lawful activities, but also of his wife and all that was hers, as well as of their children. The end of the century left him much poorer. Taxation and social legislation had reduced his power over his own possessions. Changes in the law had effectively removed his wife, her possessions, and their children from his absolute control.

The first thing he lost was his undisputed rights over his children. Prior to the passing of an act “to amend the law relating to the custody of infants” in 1839, a father had undisputed control over his legitimate children until they reached the age of sixteen—the law, with somewhat doubtful generosity, has always allowed the mother full control over her illegitimate offspring. But the privileges conferred on a mother by this act were little enough. It simply gave to a woman separated from her husband the

## MAN'S DWINDLING PROPERTY

right to apply to a specially constituted court for access to her children, provided she could prove that her own conduct had been blameless. An interesting thing, and one with which the supporters of this bill made great play, was that only the mother of children had to prove her conventional virtue in the eye of the law in order to secure access to them : it was quite within the husband's rights to remove his children from his wife's care and place them in the charge of his mistress. It is, of course, readily conceivable that in certain cases a man's mistress is a more suitable guardian of young children than their own mother, who may be incorrigibly vicious although absolutely faithful to her husband. But of such niceties in the care of infants the law took no heed : if the separated wife could prove that she was guiltless of adultery, the court, under the act of 1839, was empowered to give her custody of her children till the age of seven, and access to children above that age.

The act owed its existence to the efforts of two people, unacquainted but both ardently interested from very diverse standpoints in this aspect of the law. One, Thomas Noon Talfourd, Whig member of Parliament for Reading and a serjeant-at-law, had been led to desire a change in the law through disgust at his own success in depriving mothers of access to their children in the course of his legal practice. The other, fiery, witty, opulently beautiful Caroline Norton, whose face was sufficiently lovely to counteract the defects of a plump and too short body and make her

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

the toast of her generation, was a victim of the law as it stood.

Grand-daughter of the playwright Sheridan, she was the third in a family of seven. This little brood was gathered together in London in 1817 by their mother after her return from South Africa, whither their father had been transported only to die of the consumption which it had been hoped the climate of the new country would cure, or at least alleviate. Mrs. Tom Sheridan was poor ; but she and her children were allotted rooms at Hampton Court Palace through the interest of Frederick, Duke of York, who rendered them this service as a memento of his friendship for the playwright. Of the family of seven, three were daughters. As they grew up, their future must have presented an anxious problem to their mother. They were practically penniless, and had nothing but their Irish good looks and good breeding to offer in exchange for some man's name and protection. Despite their lack of wordly assets, however, they married well : the eldest sister, Helen, became Countess of Dufferin, the youngest, Georgiana, became Duchess of Somerset, while Caroline at the age of nineteen married George Norton, brother and heir presumptive of Earl Grantley. The marriage took place in 1827. Some nine years later, husband and wife separated, never to come together again.

Mr. Norton appears to have had none of the gifts that make marriage agreeable—he had not even the grace to outlive his brother, whom he predeceased

## MAN'S DWINDLING PROPERTY

by a few months only, and so make his wife a countess ; and Caroline was not the kind of woman to suffer patiently the trials of marriage with a mean and humourless man. Her vivacity, which gained her the applause of the world, earned her nothing but rebukes in her home. She rebelled and left her husband—to find that she had no existence as a separate human being in the eyes of the law, no rights and no means, and absolutely no claim to the children she had borne. She suffered most bitterly from the loss of her children, whom her husband removed to the care of a sister in Scotland as cold as himself, after their mother had stolen a meeting with them in St. James's Park.

Mrs. Norton became aware of Talfourd's existence through the action brought by her husband against Lord Melbourne, from whom he claimed damages for the alienation of his wife's affections. Talfourd was one of the defending counsel in the action which, intended as the preliminary step in the then cumbrous process of divorce, never had a chance of success. While Talfourd worked in the House of Commons to secure the passage of a bill which would give some rights to a mother over her infant children, Caroline Norton used all the influence she could wield by her personality and her talented pen to win support for his bill. Indeed, it is extremely probable that but for her privately printed pamphlet, "A Plain Letter to the Lord Chancellor," distributed to every member of both Houses in 1838, while the bill was still under

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

consideration for the second time, it would have again suffered the fate it did a year earlier.

That act was the first step in the process whereby the Englishman was gradually denuded of a large proportion of his property rights ; and it was regarded as extremely dangerous by those who opposed it. So low an opinion had they of the natural virtue and uprightness of women that they were convinced that any loosening of the bonds which deprived wives of all liberty would cause them to plunge immediately into nameless depravities.

At common law the father still remained the guardian of his legitimate children “ by nature and nurture ” until they reached the age of twenty-one, and could, up to the passing of the Guardianship of Infants Act of 1886, dispose of their custody after his death without reference to their mother. Under that statute, however, the mother automatically became guardian on the death of the father—alone if he had omitted to appoint some other guardian, or jointly with her husband’s nominee. She was also empowered to appoint a guardian in the case of her death : but such guardian could not act unless the courts were of opinion that the father was unfit to have sole charge of the children. Should the father die also, the mother’s guardian then acted jointly with any guardian appointed by the father. Another provision of the same act gave a mother the right to apply to the high court or the county courts for the custody of her children, and for an order defining the rights of access

## MAN'S DWINDLING PROPERTY

of either parent—a considerable extension of the provision of the Infants Custody Act of 1873 which empowered the Court of Chancery to enforce a clause in a deed of separation giving up the custody of a child to its mother.

Full guardianship of children was at last conferred equally on both parents by the Infants Custody Act of 1925.

At the time of Mrs. Norton's separation from her husband, there was no divorce in England save by private act of Parliament: which meant that there was, in fact, no divorce except for the very wealthy and the very influential. As long ago as the seventeenth century, a commission appointed by Henry VIII. had recommended the abolition of the ecclesiastical divorce *a mensa et thoro* (that is to say, separation without the right to re-marry) and the substitution of complete divorce; but the recommendations were not acted upon. More than a hundred years later, in 1669, Lord de Roos secured the passage of a private act of Parliament liberating him from his wife—the first act of its kind—and from that time such acts, though rare, continued to be passed. Between 1715 and 1775, there was an average of one a year, between 1775 and 1800 an average of three, and between 1800 and 1850 there were ninety, of which seven occurred in 1829 and nine in 1830. But these bills could be initiated by the husband only. Whatever the conduct of her spouse, a wife had no remedy. “It is a matter

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

of course," said Brougham, the Whig Lord Chancellor, friend of Caroline Norton and of that other unhappy Caroline, queen of George IV., in 1835, "that she should have no divorce, how gross soever may have been his maltreatment of her in every respect. Nor does the rule of her exclusion ever bend to any circumstance of aggravation, except that of incestuous adultery proved with her sister or other very near relation ; and of such exceptions there have been but three instances known. Where the husband had been guilty of unnatural crimes, beside ordinary ill-conduct, the wife was refused her remedy. Now, although it cannot be denied that the crime of adultery is very different in a wife, who by her infidelity may impose a spurious issue upon her husband, it is equally certain that the protection of his rights, as regards spurious progeny, ought not to be regarded as the only object of divorce ; and that misconduct of an outrageous nature, such as gross cruelty, living in open adultery with another woman, refusal to cohabit, or such incidents generally as entirely frustrate the very objects of the matrimonial union, ought either to be made severely punishable, or to be allowed as grounds of divorce to be obtained by the wife."

Fifteen years later a Royal Commission was appointed to enquire into the English marriage and divorce laws, and consequent upon its report the Marriage and Divorce Bill of 1857 was drawn up. No doubt Mr. Justice Maule's famous and oft quoted judgement on a bigamist helped to get this bill through

## MAN'S DWINDLING PROPERTY

Parliament and on to the statute book, despite the determined opposition of the bishops, and of many peers and members of the Commons—Mr. Gladstone alone made twenty-nine speeches against a single clause of the bill. The learned judge, in delivering judgement on the guilty wretch before him, drew his attention in the following ironical words to the procedure he should have adopted: “ You should have gone to the ecclesiastical courts and there obtained against your wife a decree *a mensa et thoro*. You should then have brought an action in the courts of common law and recovered, as no doubt you would have recovered, damages against your wife’s paramour. Armed with these decrees, you should have approached the legislature and obtained an act of parliament which would have rendered you free and legally competent to marry the person whom you have taken on yourself to marry with no such sanction. It is quite true that these proceedings would have cost you many hundreds of pounds, whereas you probably have not as many pence. But the law knows no distinction between rich and poor. The sentence of the court upon you, therefore, is that you be imprisoned for one day, which period has already been exceeded, as you have been in custody since the commencement of the assizes.”

Lord Cranworth introduced into the Lords in 1854 a bill to remove jurisdiction in matrimonial affairs from the ecclesiastical courts to a special court of their own, but it disappeared in committee. The act

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

of 1857, which became effective on 1st January, 1858, was promoted by the Attorney-General, Sir Richard Bethell (afterwards Lord Westbury), and carried through by him almost single-handed. Bethell had been something of an infant prodigy. Born in 1800, he supported himself from the age of seventeen, but nevertheless managed to continue his studies at Wadham and at eighteen to take a first in classics and a second in mathematics. He became a Q.C. in 1840, entered Parliament in 1851, "prepared to support the ballot and the abolition of church rates," became Solicitor-General in 1852, and Attorney-General in 1856. "His manner of speech," says the Dictionary of National Biography, "was the outcome of an overpowering and evidently sincere belief in his own intellectual superiority over other men, and his sleepless ambition to have his superiority recognised."

Like Lord Cranworth's bill, Bethell's proposed to remove all matters connected with divorce from the ecclesiastical courts to a newly constituted lay court. To the same court were also to be transferred the powers exercised in other matrimonial matters by the House of Lords, the ecclesiastical courts, and the courts of common law. Further, the bill proposed to give to both spouses the right of divorce, with power to re-marry, and though in the case of a wife she had to prove cruelty or desertion by her husband as well as the adultery which was all a husband had to prove against his wife, her ability to sue for divorce at all meant an immense advance in the legal position

## MAN'S DWINDLING PROPERTY

of the married woman. Other clauses in the bill provided for legal separation, for the custody of the children in such separations, for the payment of maintenance to an injured wife, and for her enjoyment unhampered by any claims of her husband or his creditors of any earnings or inheritance she might acquire after the separation. Though hotly debated as to almost every word, the bill reached the statute book substantially as it had been drafted. Attempts were made in both the Lords and the Commons to introduce a clause prohibiting the subsequent inter-marriage of the persons for whose joint adultery a divorce was pronounced, but they were frustrated ; and much controversy was roused over the question of whether the clergy of the established church could be required by law to officiate at the marriage of divorced persons. "Suppose them coming fresh from the bed of fornication to solicit the intervention of the clergyman " was one phrase on this matter that dropped from the mouth of Bethell. It was ultimately decreed that a clergyman might marry divorced persons, but if he had conscientious scruples he could refuse : provided he did not prevent the use of his church by a brother cleric with a less tender conscience or a broader humanity.

It was left to a later bill, passed in 1860, to introduce the procedure by which divorces are not made absolute until the lapse of a period of time—at first not less than three, subsequently not less than six months—after the granting of the decree *nisi*. The object of

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

this delay was to check collusion between the parties by giving the Queen's Proctor opportunity to test the veracity of the grounds on which the decree had been granted. The abuses created by this change of procedure were endless. A far more rational change would have been to insist that there must be collusion : but the law of divorce in this country continues to insist that a decree can be granted only if the person applying for it does not really desire it !

During the first year that the Marriage and Divorce Act was in force, over three hundred actions were tried. Twenty years later, there were nearly twice as many, and the tale of matrimonial causes has risen more or less steadily ever since. For many years, the actions brought by husbands exceeded those presented by wives : but this is less surprising than might at first appear when one takes into consideration not only the fact that a wife had to prove cruelty or desertion as well as adultery, but that a wife who had divorced her husband was scarcely less an object of suspicion and social ostracism than one who had been divorced. It simply was not done, for a woman to reveal to the world the miseries of an unhappy domestic situation. For thirty years after the passing of the act, Queen Victoria refused to receive any woman who had figured in the divorce court, whether as the guilty or the innocent party. No such rule debarred men from her presence. It was Lord Salisbury who persuaded her at last to change her attitude towards successful women petitioners—by

## MAN'S DWINDLING PROPERTY

pointing out to her that their characters had emerged triumphant from the searchlights shone on them by both opposing counsel and the Queen's Proctor. Salisbury, indeed, expressed a wish that the Queen would refuse to receive men who had been divorced, "but this would be a very considerable change," he added significantly. Where the Queen set the fashion, Society followed, and those of the middle-class who aped Society carried Society's foible in this respect to even bitterer lengths. If, as the biographer of Mrs. Norton remarks, a woman who left her husband in the eighteen-thirties was either very silly or very desperate, for many years after the passing of the Marriage and Divorce Act she still had to be fairly desperate and also possessed of unusual self-sufficiency if she sought to regain her freedom through the divorce court.

For the first time in English law a wife was conceded certain property rights by the Marriage and Divorce Act of 1857: that is to say, it enacted that a wife deserted by her husband could apply to a police magistrate, to the justices in petty sessions, or to the court for an order to protect from her husband or his creditors any money or property she might acquire by her own lawful industry, and any property she might become possessed of after the desertion; and that if the magistrate or justices or court was satisfied of the justice of her claim, she was entitled to an order giving her the same rights over such earnings and

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

property as if she were a *feme sole* (single woman). Furniture bought with the gains of prostitution and placed in a brothel to be used there was alone considered as outside such protection, although prostitution—or, as the *Encyclopædia Britannica* puts it, promiscuous unchastity for gain—has never been declared unlawful in this country. During their interminable disputes over money and other matters, George Norton took possession of all his wife's contracts with publishers, and could, if he had so chosen, have taken possession of her royalties too. He had, and he held, her jointure of £1,500. Had he claimed her earnings, there was no power to prevent his receiving them, or to compel him in that case to provide for her, since she had left his roof of her own accord and had refused to return to it.

Any personal property of which a woman was possessed passed absolutely to her husband on marriage. Moreover, any agreements a man and woman might have entered into before marriage ceased to be effective on their union. Nor could a man give anything to his wife, since they were one person: a one-sided unity, which involved the merging of the woman in the man, never the man in the woman. Dame Millicent Fawcett tells an amusing story of how Mrs. Grote, who invariably referred to her distinguished husband as “the Historian,” became a suffragist: “When I discovered,” said the good lady, “that the purse in my pocket and the watch at my side were not my own, but the Historian’s, I

## MAN'S DWINDLING PROPERTY

felt it was time women should have the power to amend these preposterous laws." Dame Millicent then goes on to describe how the same humiliating fact was brought home to her personally. One day at Waterloo Station she took her ticket, and as she slipped her purse back into her pocket she felt there another hand "not her own." She tried to hold it, but the thief eluded her grasp, and fled—only to fall ultimately into the arms of a policeman. She went with him to the police station and made a charge. When she came up six weeks later to give evidence against the pickpocket, she found that he was charged "with stealing from the person of Millicent Fawcett a purse containing £1 18s. 6d., the property of Henry Fawcett." . . . "I felt," she ends, "as if I had been charged with theft myself."

A wife's freehold property was vested in her and her husband jointly, the husband having the management of it. A husband was entitled on his wife's death to hold as tenant for life an estate of inheritance which she had enjoyed during the marriage, provided there was a child who could ultimately inherit.

In return for complete loss of her possessions, the wife was entitled, while she lived under her husband's protection, to be maintained by him in the style he thought fit. She had also the right to a third of his personal estate if he died intestate, and a right to dower in his lands: but this last right, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, had been whittled away to almost nothing; and as that century progressed

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

and wealth came to consist more and more in industry and less and less in land, its value became practically nil. Any debts a woman might have at her marriage passed, like her possessions, to her husband, and during marriage she could not enter into a contract or create an obligation on herself or on the property she had formerly possessed : " her separate existence was not so much as contemplated, as long as her husband was alive."\*

Lawyers, of course, had, in the typical English way, found methods of getting round the strict letter of the law, and long before the passage of the Marriage and Divorce Act the courts of Equity recognised a married woman's separate estate provided the wording of the deed conferring such estate on her made it indisputably clear that it was intended for her sole use. It was not, however, till 1870 that the first Married Women's Property Bill was introduced into the House of Commons. Its sponsor was Mr. Russell Gurney, Q.C., once a schoolfellow of Disraeli and then Recorder of London and Conservative member for Southampton. Emily Davies remarked of him in 1863, " His face is the most beautiful I have ever seen, I think, except Mr. Maurice's," and the Dictionary of National Biography describes him as " of slight frame, but strikingly handsome, remarkable for gentleness, courtesy, and an affectionate nature." He had, with his wife, been a consistent worker for the advancement of women's education. He befriended Elizabeth

\* " Married Women's Property Act, 1882," by H. A. Smith, p. 4.

## MAN'S DWINDLING PROPERTY

Blackwell when she first came to London, supported Mr. Garrett's efforts to obtain the extension to women of the privileges of London University, and generally gave whole-hearted support to the opening of the medical profession to women. He was one of the members of the committee got together by Emily Davies in 1862 to secure the admission of women to the university local examinations ; and in 1867 had presented to Parliament a petition for woman suffrage signed by women householders. He had also been one of the three commissioners sent to Jamaica in 1865, of whom Sir Henry Storks, best hated advocate of the Contagious Diseases Acts, had been another.

The bill was, says the Annual Register, “ so modified by amendments of the House of Lords which were accepted by the lower House as to lose much of its original character, and to leave married women, in the eye of the law, ‘ much what they were before ’—incompetent to use, bequeath, or hold their own money. The feeling that social discomfort might ensue from a radical change in the practice of the country in this respect proved too strong for the advocates of woman’s rights, however strongly some might think the position of the latter fortified by logic and sense. But the bill, even as passed, was a first recognition of a new principle, another small sign of the times—like the ‘ side wind ’ that introduced the ballot and lump-voting—that the old creeds were passing away, and, whether for good or for evil, all things becoming new.”

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

The act as passed gave a married woman a separate existence from her husband to the extent that she was entitled to earnings acquired in any employment carried on apart from her husband, and could inherit for her own use any personal property coming to her under an intestacy, or any sum of money up to £200 coming to her under a deed or will, and the rents and profits of real property descending to her as heiress of an intestate. Except for these small concessions, the husband's rights over the wife's property remained as before.

This timid first step, all important as it was by its recognition of married women as individual human beings, was followed twelve years later by a bolder act which declared a woman married after the act came into force to be capable of "acquiring, holding, and disposing by will or otherwise of any real or personal property as her separate property, in the same manner as if she were feme sole, without the intervention of any trustee." A woman married before the act was given the same rights in any property acquired after the act. This act also imposed on married women with separate property liability to the parish for the maintenance of their pauper husband or children ; and it made a wife responsible for her own pre-marriage debts. A third act, passed in 1893, removed the wife's property from the control of the husband, and provided that any contract entered into by a married woman, except as the agent of her husband, should be binding upon her separate

## MAN'S DWINDLING PROPERTY

property only, whether in fact she possessed any or not at the time she entered into the contract. The last brick was laid on the edifice recognising the individual responsibility of a married woman by an act of 1908, which made her, if possessed of separate property, equally liable with single women and widows for the maintenance of pauper parents.

The century that deprived men first of complete control of their legitimate children, then of their wives, and lastly of their wives' property also saw them mulcted of a good measure of their own possessions.

To defray the cost of war with France, an income tax of ten per cent. on all incomes over £60 was instituted in 1798, and continued to be levied until the end of the war in 1815 ; but the tax was so hated that Parliament ordered the destruction of all documents relating to it. For twenty-seven years it remained in oblivion. Then it was reintroduced at the rate of 7d. in the pound by Sir Robert Peel, to make up for the deficiency in national income caused by his free trade policy. It was raised to 1s. 4d. in the pound to meet the cost of the Crimean War, but was only 2d. in 1874, in which year Mr. Gladstone announced when he dissolved Parliament that he would abolish the tax if his Government were once more returned to office : a promise that failed to carry the country. Nor has there ever been a question of abolishing it since. It has gradually become a more and more important element in the balancing of the budget, and

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

has risen continually with the passing of the years, until a wise man no longer counts his income as the figure on which he is liable to be taxed, but as the sum remaining when he has deducted the tax from that figure. To-day, every man and woman in the nation liable to income tax would smile broadly if it could be reduced to the odious ten per cent. that paid for the Napoleonic wars. . . .

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, a man's possessions passed to his heirs as he left them. Pitt had attempted to introduce a succession duty in 1796, but had failed. The Crimean War gave Gladstone an opportunity to levy a modest succession duty on land and settled property, alongside the probate and legacy duties on free personalty that were already in force. In 1894, however, came the introduction of Harcourt's estate duty. Under the Finance Act of that year, all property of whatsoever kind was aggregated to form one estate and became liable to the new "death duty." From that year dates the final break-up of the great landed estates, the crumbling of the last vestiges of the feudal spirit left alive in England. A man could no longer hand on intact the lands that had come to him : some part of them would pass to strangers, to satisfy the demands of the national exchequer. The sense of continuity from one generation to another was lost ; and as it loosened its hold on the landed classes, it loosened its hold also on the industrial classes, among whom it had not existed long enough to take deep root. The son of

## MAN'S DWINDLING PROPERTY

a titled father continued to succeed to the title, but the estates that had once gone with it grew more and more illusory. The son of the industrialist tended more and more to escape from the business of his father—which, from being a family concern with a personality of its own, tended more and more to become a soulless limited liability company.

The old anchors had given way, the old faiths were breaking down as the new, the twentieth century dawned.

## CHAPTER XI

### MILITANT DAYS

“ When women become more conceited they will become more just. I wish them, therefore, what I cannot possibly wish men—a better opinion of themselves.”

ROBERT HICHENS (1900).

BEFORE the turn of the century, change was stirring. The expansion of British trade was beginning clearly to have limits. The extension of the ballot to the working man was beginning to take effect—an avowedly Labour man, not a labouring man returned as a protégé of the Liberal party, had reached the House of Commons. Women were developing into individualities : they were getting accustomed to education, they had taken to cigarette smoking, they demanded, and obtained, latchkeys, they lived alone in flats, and they did not have to wait, as Harriet Martineau had done, till they were forty-two before they could do so—the term “ bachelor girl ” was born in the 'nineties. But the fifty-year-old sense of prosperity and security that triumphantly expanding industrialism had conferred on Great Britain was not severely shaken until the amazing reverses suffered by British arms in the South African War.

That a British army could be defeated, not once, but

## MILITANT DAYS

thrice—in one week—by a people who had been regarded in this country as little better than the natives and frontier tribesmen against whom we had waged successful wars for decades, was so intense a shock to Great Britain that the enemy became a monster of immense proportions, against whom hysteria and red-white-and-blue patriotism raged. The British recovered, naturally, but not quite so speedily as to allay all doubts of the possibility that a British army might be effectively and finally defeated ; and the hostility shown to Great Britain in Europe, by Germany in particular, over the whole affair caused not a little surprise, and a definite feeling of shakiness about national security, which was not dissipated by Germany's immediately launching into a campaign of naval rivalry.

This growing sense of general insecurity was reflected in and enhanced by the frequent labour troubles, the increase of Labour representation in Parliament, the violent agitation for “tariff reform,” the conflict between the House of Commons and the Lords, and, perhaps more than anything else, by the sudden emergence of militant tactics among the women demanding the vote. For more than thirty years, women suffragists and their men supporters had gone on holding meetings, presenting petitions to Parliament, introducing bills and resolutions into the House, using personal persuasion and influence, in the hope of obtaining enfranchisement for women. All in vain. Woman suffrage seemed,

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

if anything, more remote in 1900 than it had done in 1867, when Mill moved the omission of the word "man" from the Reform Bill of that year and the substitution of the word "person," and secured 73 votes for his motion in a House of 269 members. Thirty years later, hope had been deferred too often for women to feel anything like the same optimism as they had done over Mill's defeat when a bill introduced by Mr. Faithfull Begg was carried on its second reading by 228 votes to 157: that bill, like its many abortive predecessors, went no farther.

Possibly the damping down during the South African War of even the strictly constitutional and almost ladylike activities of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies accounts for the outburst of fierce activity that began in 1905. The personality behind this sudden change of tactics was a slight, frail little woman with an indomitable spirit, the widow of Richard Marsden Pankhurst, a Manchester barrister. He had been a friend of J. S. Mill, and had drafted the Married Women's Property Act of 1882. For twenty years, Emmeline Pankhurst, mother of a family of girls, had worked side by side with her husband in the Manchester Suffrage Society, spreading the suffrage doctrine among the mill hands of the cotton trade, and taking also an active part in local government. The cotton industry is the one trade in which men and women have marched side by side in trade unionism. From the beginning, they have been organised in the same unions, and though the women,

## MILITANT DAYS

despite the fact that they numbered nearly half the membership, took comparatively little part in the government and organisation of the unions, yet the fact that they belonged to them, and paid their dues, made them far more aware of trade union, and general, politics than other women workers. In this fruitful soil, the Manchester Suffrage Society sowed its seed to advantage—one petition sent up to Parliament contained 67,000 signatures of mill hands ; and there Mrs. Pankhurst might have continued to labour peacefully till she died, had not her husband's death in 1898 freed her to follow her own bent in her political activities.

Influenced, no doubt, by the current sense of change in all things, she sought for some fresh means of presenting and popularising the demand for women's suffrage. The year after the war in South Africa ended, she and some of her Manchester colleagues combined to form a new organisation, the Women's Social and Political Union. By degrees, Mrs. Pankhurst's collaborators fell away, and the Union developed into an autocracy of which Mrs. Pankhurst was the undisputed head, and her clever, handsome daughter, Christabel, was the second in command, with another daughter, Sylvia, and Annie Kenney, a mill hand, as able lieutenants. At first, the new society made no more impression on the general public than the old ones had done. But in 1905 there came a change. A general election was pending. It had been the custom of the older societies to ask individual

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

candidates their attitude on the suffrage question, and to work in each constituency for the candidate who would support votes for women if returned to Parliament, irrespective of his views on other matters. But nearly forty years of disappointment had clearly shown that a private member's bill, however well supported, had no chance of becoming law. A woman suffrage bill, to succeed, must be a Government measure. The Women's Social and Political Union, therefore, decided to adopt a new policy, and to ask candidates, and particularly Conservative ex-Cabinet Ministers, and those likely to be in the Cabinet if the Liberals came into power, what the attitude of their party was on the subject.

This new campaign opened at Manchester in October, 1905 ; and Sir Edward Grey (afterwards Earl Grey of Falloden) was the first prominent politician to be asked the new form of question. The meeting at which he spoke had been called together in the Free Trade Hall in order that he could outline the policy his party would pursue if they won the day in the forthcoming contest. It was not unreasonable, therefore, that he should be asked at question time by Annie Kenney, "Will the Liberal Government give votes to working women ?" Instead of answering in any of the innumerable evasive ways open to an adroit politician, Grey ignored the question. Miss Kenney continued to stand, however, and to display a small banner inscribed "Votes for Women." Still Grey took no heed of

## MILITANT DAYS

her. Instead, stewards rushed forward and tried to force her back into her seat. At this moment Christabel Pankhurst rose, displayed a similar banner, and asked the same question. More disturbance occurred when stewards tried to force her also to sit down again. At last the Chief Constable of Manchester, who was on the platform, came forward, and suggested that the question should be put in writing. His suggestion was adopted and the paper was handed to him, and by him to Grey. But still there was no answer.

As the meeting drew to a close, Annie Kenney rose again, and again put her question. This time the two girls were seized by the stewards and thrown down the steps of the hall to the street. Shaken as they were, they pulled themselves together at once and began to address the curious crowd that had gathered about them. The police tried without success to disperse the fortuitous audience, and at last arrested the young speakers for obstruction.

Only after the two girls had been thrown out of his meeting did Grey deign to refer to the question they had asked. He explained that he did not consider woman suffrage a party question, and had therefore thought it outside the scope of the meeting. Next day his questioners were brought before the magistrates, and sentenced, one to a fine of ten shillings or seven days' imprisonment, the other to a fine of five shillings or three days' imprisonment. They elected to go to prison. Thus was set going a form of protest which

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

was to prove the first effective weapon in securing publicity that the women suffragists had tried.

The disturbance caused at Grey's meeting got into the papers. So did the police court appearance of his questioners, and their astonishing choice of going to prison instead of paying the trivial fines imposed on them. For the first time, thousands of men and women read over their breakfasts the violent tirades against woman suffrage and those who agitated for it which were to become their almost daily fare for nearly ten years. Just as the Bradlaugh-Besant case had drawn Press attention to contraception, and the Stead case to the existence of child prostitution, so this mild political action of two devoted young women at last opened the columns of British daily newspapers to the subject of votes for women. It was immaterial that most of the comment was adverse. Comment there was, and it was read and discussed. In 'buses and trains and clubs and in all other places where men and women meet, the doings of the "suffragettes" soon became a staple topic of conversation.

Their doings were often ingenious. They invaded the lobbies of the House of Commons and there displayed banners and made speeches in favour of votes for women; and when their persistence had rendered any woman in the neighbourhood of the House an object of suspicion to the vigilant police, they drove up in force on one occasion concealed in a furniture van. They padlocked themselves to the

## MILITANT DAYS

railings of No. 10, Downing Street, to the statues in the central hall of the House of Commons, and to the grille of the ladies' gallery ; they chartered a boat and from the river harangued members taking tea on the terrace. And they adopted a policy of organised interruption at all meetings addressed by prominent politicians. For five years they received violence but did none. Then they adopted window smashing, picture slashing, the destruction of letters in pillar-boxes, the burning of empty buildings—and the slapping of policemen's faces as fresh means of getting arrested and securing publicity. Only one person died through their activities, though by the space they received in the newspapers every one of their actions might have involved life and death. The one martyr was a suffragette, Emily Davison, who threw herself under the King's horse at the 1913 Derby, and died four days later. Her funeral procession across London was the most impressive of all the pageants arranged by militant or non-militant suffrage organisations.

For the emergence of the militant movement caused the non-militant societies to become more enterprising ; and while the militant activities were anathematised to their readers by a hostile press, the suffrage message was proclaimed at street corners by militant and non-militant suffragist alike. There was a friendly rivalry between the two sections of the movement in street paper-selling, and in the promotion of street processions. The idea was gaining ground

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

more and more in the minds of the general public that women really did want the vote.

The most surprising thing to outsiders, and the most exhilarating thing to the members of the Women's Social and Political Union themselves, was the sense of solidarity among women that these activities promoted. Never before had women combined with women in such single-hearted devotion to a cause ; never before had they submitted to this kind of voluntary discipline. And for every woman arrested and imprisoned, there were two ready to come forward and take her place in the fighting ranks. Women discovered, and revealed too, that they were not the delicate creatures men had persisted in regarding them. The sight of a girl struggling in the arms of a policeman was not edifying ; but the girl found that she had enough physical strength to be a source of annoyance to him. Prison fare and prison conditions were such that ladies could scarcely be expected to survive them ; but they did, some of them repeatedly. And when they adopted the desperate expedient of the hunger and even the thirst strike in prison, they showed remarkable powers of endurance. It is true that the health of some was ruined by forcible feeding, and by the slow torture imposed on them by what was known as the Cat-and-Mouse Act,\* but the vast majority contrived not

\* An act passed in 1913 by an exasperated Government, under which a suffragette prisoner who had made herself ill by hunger-striking was not released unconditionally, but temporarily on licence, to be re-arrested to finish her term when she was sufficiently restored to health.

## MILITANT DAYS

only to survive, but to continue active life. Mrs Pankhurst herself, who died in 1928 at the age of seventy, was one of the principal victims of this act. She was slowly serving out a sentence of three years' penal servitude on a charge of felony in connection with the blowing up of the Walton home of Mr. Lloyd George, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, when the Great War broke out.

The dawn of the twentieth century found women still voteless ; but otherwise they were in a vastly different position from that they had occupied at the dawn of the nineteenth. From the elementary schools to the university, education of the same standard as that of boys was open to them. Numerous ways of earning their living were available—not that in this they had acquired equality with men, but they were making progress in that direction. Instead of the one possibility of governessing, middle-class women could now choose between teaching, the civil service, journalism, business, the stage, art, nursing, medicine—a career to suit any temperament instead of forcing the temperament to the only career available. They were not paid as high salaries as men, but they could earn enough to keep themselves in some sort of comfort ; and though few of them planned their lives as business careers, fewer still were exempted by their parents from the obligation to fit themselves to pursue a career by which they could be self-supporting if they failed to marry. Though the great

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

majority of women continued to regard paid employment as an interlude between school and marriage, the more intelligent no longer rushed headlong into the first marriage that offered ; nor did they contemplate the future, if marriage did not offer, with unmitigated gloom. It might still be true that most women regarded wifehood, home, and maternity as the best that life could give them. But the few who regarded self-development and self-support as preferable were able to follow their heart's desire in the knowledge that the means of achieving a comfortable position for themselves—even public prominence with honour —was within their power if they had the necessary ability, grit, and good health.

If the public recognition had not quite arrived at the beginning of the century, it was there within a dozen years. At the first election of Beit Fellows for medical research in 1910, a woman was among the ten chosen. The Royal College of Surgeons admitted women to its examinations for fellowship in 1908 ; and three years later Miss Eleanor Davies-Colley was admitted the first woman member of the College. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson added to the distinction of her pioneer work in opening medicine to women the civic distinction of becoming the first woman mayor when she was elected mayor of her native Aldeburgh in 1908 : for once, a prophet honoured in her own land. In 1913, Miss Emily Duncan, who had served as a Poor Law Guardian in West Ham, was appointed the first woman magistrate ; and in the

## MILITANT DAYS

same year the Royal Geographical Society admitted women as members.

As the unmarried business or professional woman became an accepted member of society, the dreaded label "old maid" no longer held the same terrors : the ability to support herself had given self-respect to every woman. It was no longer peculiar for an unmarried woman to live alone, or with a companion of similar status. It was possible for her to have male friends, and to entertain them in her rooms, without arousing comment from any but the hopelessly old-fashioned ; and if her friendship with some man was warmer than her grandmother would have deemed proper, the world in general paid no heed to the matter. Knowledge of contraception was not yet very widespread, but it was accessible. Not that it was regarded as desirable by some of the more fiery spirits among the younger advocates of women's freedom : they claimed the right to motherhood, without marriage, as their privilege. They assumed, rightly or wrongly, that they could choose a suitable father with more certainty if they were unhampered by the necessity of choosing a husband at the same time. They wanted, moreover, to have the undisputed guardianship of the children they were to bear—theirs would be the pains of birth, theirs they felt should be the privilege of control, and only by bearing legally fatherless children could they enjoy this guardianship and control.

One cannot estimate what percentage of the young

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

women who promulgated these doctrines lived up to them. Some certainly did ; and of these one does not know what percentage carried their purpose through to second and third children, but I suspect extremely few. Even a desired baby is a handicap to the woman who has to earn her living. A woman to whom motherhood was the ideal condition of being (and there are such women—women who are supremely happy and healthy while carrying a child, and to whom childbirth itself is no more painful than the drawing of a tooth) would no doubt have rejoiced to carry these doctrines to the limit of her capacity for child-bearing if she had means. But it was among the young women of ambition, in training for a career, that the doctrine of the right to motherhood found advocates ; and to most of these the carrying into effect of their doctrine proved impracticable. But the fact that it gained adherents among the intelligent and ambitious young women of the early nineteen-hundreds had this beneficial result : that it helped to remove the slur from illegitimacy, and to smooth the path of the illegitimate. Thirty years ago an illegitimate child of undistinguished parentage had no chance of acceptance in a well-known school. To-day, the illegitimate child, boy or girl, is debarred from no reputable school on account of its birth.

The new orientation of women to life and its responsibilities and problems slowly and steadily penetrated the minds of the middle-class. The simple

## MILITANT DAYS

codes of a century ago were inadequate. New codes had to be formulated ; and new teachers were at hand. Westermarck's monumental treatise on human marriage appeared in 1894 ; Havelock Ellis began to publish the results of his researches into sexual psychology about the same time. But these works, like all serious scientific studies, did not reach the general public. William Morris, in "News from Nowhere," published in 1891, had already depicted an ideal society in which marriage would be free ; but in 1896 appeared a little book called "Love's Coming of Age," treating of sex in society as it actually is. Its author, Edward Carpenter, began life as curate to F. D. Maurice, but in a very short time he found himself deficient in faith, and in consequence abandoned holy orders. For a year or two he lectured under the University Extension scheme. Then he retired to a workman's cottage to live a life of simplicity among manual labourers. He published several works in socialist vein, and was nearing fifty when he brought out "Love's Coming of Age." It had an unexpected success, and, indeed, still continues to sell. Highly charged with emotion and often sentimental, it yet was, for the day in which it appeared, startlingly frank. It entered a world ashamed to discuss the intimacies of sex relationships, either verbally or in print. It went through one edition after another, and for twenty years after its first appearance it revealed a new outlook on sex as something to be accepted and enjoyed instead

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

of repressed and feared, to the impressionable young who read it.

But of all the new influences affecting the formation and development of new codes, perhaps the researches and conclusions of a group of Continental psychologists had the profoundest effect. It was some dozen years after the publication in 1895 of "Studien über Hysterie" in Germany that the theories of Freud began to reach the English public. If few people read the works of Freud himself, none could altogether escape their influence. A glimmer of understanding of the complicated, half-hidden mechanism of the human consciousness, of the interdependence of physical and mental equilibrium, and of the immense unhappiness due to sex hunger and sex repression was lighted up in the minds of men and women. It began to be appreciated that the Victorian father who did not spare the rod, the Victorian mother who constantly used the cane were working off in this way the unrealised urges of their suppressed sex-life ; that to beat children in cold blood, as the Victorians did, to suppress their natural high spirits and inquisitive tongues was indicative not of parental strength, but of parental inadequacy to cope with life as it is. The need of a man for some sex experience outside marriage, however happy, which had led to the ugliness of Victorian prostitution, began to be realised as something normal and natural to many, perhaps to most. That women might have the same need was scarcely yet admitted ; but

## MILITANT DAYS

it was implicit in the new doctrines of sexual psychology.

Nowhere can the effect of these new doctrines be appreciated more clearly than in a study of the serious fiction current before and after they had taken hold of popular understanding. The serious fiction of the nineteenth century seems now as stereotyped and unreal in its psychological content as the magazine fiction of to-day. Meredith's "*Diana of the Crossways*"—one of the best-known novels of the century, and still among the most readable—is far more remote from present-day readers than one of Shakespeare's comedies. The genuine and enduring emotions of love—jealousy—hate—ambition inspire Shakespeare's characters. He did not know Freud, but he understood human psychology in its nakedness. False motives, false attitudes to the fundamentals of life inspire the characters in Meredith's novel. Their reactions, at one remove from reality, go flat on the palate. In her girlhood, Diana feels nothing but humiliation because her friend's husband seizes her and tries to kiss her. Surprise, annoyance, panic, perhaps—but humiliation? She would, more reasonably, be pleased at this evidence of her power to please, since she did not dislike the man. Humiliation would have been remote from a mind that approached sex honestly. In her later years, Diana is made to reflect much on her passing youth and her sense of its waste; but her reflections have a hollow ring. There is no directness, no simplicity

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

in her tinsel emotions. Nor is there any echo of truth in the pale excuses she finds for rushing in the dead of night to the offices of her editor-friend with the political information just imparted to her alone by her politician-would-be-lover. A woman intelligent enough to receive the information, and make good financial use of it, as Diana did, would have understood what she was doing—or else she would not have done it. The new psychology, partially uncovering the realms of the unconscious mind, brought awareness of the falsity of such machine-made situations: they creak in our ears. The situations that seemed so bold to Meredith's contemporaries seem clumsy to-day. One sees too clearly the scheme of action being arranged in the author's mind. One does not feel that the action develops naturally from the nature of the actors.

The serious fiction that came after Freud gave, for a time at least, perhaps too much attention to the psychological adventures of its characters; but it lost that woodenness of conception. It concerned itself with the struggles of the human mind to understand itself and the situations into which circumstance and temperament thrust it.

The growing emancipation of women, the clearer and more honest attitude to sex that was gradually emerging among both men and women did not immediately make marriage easier. In some ways, it made it more difficult. Theodore Pontifex, suppres-

## MILITANT DAYS

sing his Christina to obedience by one master-stroke of tyranny, had an easier if not a happier time than the man who tried to live up to the ideal of equality in marriage that was already the aim of the more intelligent young people of the nineteen-hundreds. Christina too, dutifully suppressing her will to that of her husband, had no further need to wrestle with the problem of conflicting wishes, contrasting desires. Unprotesting, submissive, she lay on the bed she had provided for herself, because life offered her no alternative. The will of one spouse was the will of both. The human spirit might be destroyed, personality might be crushed by the working of the Victorian code of marriage ; but it produced stability among those who were not rebellious—and in the heyday of its working women could not afford to be rebellious.

H. G. Wells, most faithful recorder of the minds of his contemporaries, treated the relationship of marriage as it was affected by the new ideas in more than one of his early novels. To one, indeed, he gave the title "*Marriage*" ; and in that book, though he runs away from the problem he presents, yet he does state that problem very clearly—adaptation of the marriage bond to the needs and state of social development of the young people of the nineteen-hundreds. The man is a keen student of biological research ; the woman, a girl who has been through school and college, who is equipped with the education needed to fit her for a career, but who falls in love

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

and marries before she has had time to find out the actualities of life outside the sphere of home where everything is provided for her and she has no economic worries. She comes to marriage expecting still to be provided for, well provided for—she and her children. Despite her education, she is no better fitted than her mother to realise the man's struggle with himself and the world in his efforts to provide for her in a way she considers suitable. Her ambition—the Victorian woman's ambition—to achieve greater social success, greater financial security than her sister and her women friends, drives her husband on and on into realms of commercial activity that he loathes, drives him effectually out of the research work he loves and which would have provided them with a sufficient, if modest, income. But her education has given her a breadth of mind that demands freedom of activity for herself in marriage. Two young people, passionately in love and convinced when they marry that they understand one another well enough to make a success of the relationship in the new freedom of the new century, find themselves after some years completely estranged in essentials. To their Victorian forebears, this was a natural situation ; to them it is not. Wells fails, in fact, to solve this problem, which presented itself freshly in the decade before the war to hundreds of young couples, because he sends his hero and heroine into the snowy wastes of Labrador to struggle together and alone with nature at her harshest : and such a method of attaining

## MILITANT DAYS

understanding is open to few ; but the statement of it is there, set down with psychological insight.

Increased knowledge, increased freedom, increasing understanding were vivifying life and all its problems for women, removing much of the obscure mental and moral suffering of the Victorians ; but the problems of sex relationship were by no means solved.

## CHAPTER XII

### WARTIME FREEDOMS

“The women are wonderful.”

LORD NORTHCLIFFE (1916).

ALL the restlessness of twenty years seemed to culminate in the outbreak of war in Europe in August, 1914. For a few months, a fatuous optimism reigned as to the speed with which the struggle would end. Despite the bellicose tone of much of the matter that had been dished up for years by the newspapers, despite the violence with which national animosities had been exploited by press and politicians, the average man and woman found it difficult at first to believe that in the year 1914 of the Christian era the nations of Europe could long continue to waste their substance and their precious young lives in war. But it soon became clear that here was a struggle for existence, that a grim will to victory possessed the enemy, and that brains and equipment of equal power were pitted against one another in the rival camps into which Europe had divided. Here was no easy contest against a primitive, undisciplined foe, but a bitter war, involving the life or death of more than individuals, a war beside which the South African

## WARTIME FREEDOMS

war that had shaken England to her foundations seemed trivial.

The whole nation concentrated its attention on the one great problem of war. Ireland, tariffs, labour disputes, party politics, the suffrage campaign ceased to have any significance. Rapidly, the life of the entire nation was re-organised to one end—the effort to win. The re-adjustments necessary to this re-organisation produced both sorrow and hardship. Women whose men—husbands, brothers, sons—had volunteered were left a prey to anxiety and distress; while the financial and industrial uncertainty of the first chaotic weeks led to serious unemployment, and consequent privation, among women workers: it has been estimated that in October, 1914, something like a seventh of the women in work on 4th August had lost their employment.

As during the South African war, the societies working for woman suffrage abandoned their campaign immediately war broke out and turned their energies into fresh channels. Women who had been active in the suffrage movement combined with others who had been hostile to it to open workrooms for the relief of unemployed women; to form committees for the reception and care of the Belgian refugees who began to arrive in considerable numbers before August was out; to organise entertainments for wounded and convalescent soldiers, and clubs and distractions for soldiers' and sailors' wives. Even the militant Women's Social and Political Union

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

called a truce, and offered its services and its organisation to the Government it had opposed and made ridiculous. The Government responded by releasing unconditionally all women undergoing imprisonment for offences in connection with suffrage activities ; but it had no immediate use for the help of the W.S.P.U. —nor for that of other women and women's organisations which came eagerly forward. It was months before the Government or the army thought it worth while to employ the women doctors who offered themselves at once : capable and experienced women doctors and surgeons were not merely ignored, they were affronted. Dr. Elsie Inglis, who had founded a school of medicine for women in Edinburgh in 1892, and had also established there in 1901 the only maternity training centre for women in Scotland, was told to go home and keep quiet when she proffered her services as surgeon and hospital organiser to the head of the Royal Army Medical Corps in Scotland. Instead, she set about her self-appointed task without official backing. With the assistance of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, of whose Scottish Federation she was founder and honorary secretary, she raised nearly half a million pounds and organised and equipped fourteen separate hospital units which, under the title of Scottish Women's Hospitals, did splendid work both in France and in the Balkans. Her energy was matched by that of Dr. Louisa Garrett Anderson, daughter of the pioneer Elizabeth Garrett, and Dr. Flora Murray. Like

## WARTIME FREEDOMS

Dr. Inglis, they were ignored when they offered to staff and equip a service hospital in France. Like her, they persisted: they made their offer to the French, who accepted it and allowed them a few weeks after the war began to establish a hospital for French wounded in Paris. A month later they opened a second hospital at Wimereux: which the British War Office was pleased to recognise. Next year, when the British official attitude towards women was undergoing a distinct change, they were invited to take charge of a military hospital in London, staffed entirely by women, and there they continued their labours till after the war ended.

By the spring of 1915, the fact had definitely penetrated the public consciousness that the war was going to be long and serious. More men, more munitions were demanded; and this double demand made women not merely useful but necessary. It also at last provided an outlet for Mrs. Pankhurst's energies: she organised a great procession to attract women into the munitions industry, and spoke up and down the land on the urgent necessity for women to come to the help of their country. As men were drawn away from all walks of civilian life into the army, women came from their homes to take their places, and to fill the new places created by the fighting army's ever-increasing needs in the industries supplying munitions and equipment. Women penetrated into banks and offices, into the engineering and transport industries, into innumerable positions

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

and trades from which they had hitherto been debarred. They were successful, too. The rapidity with which they mastered many of the jobs, both in offices and industry, that had always been claimed by men as being too difficult for them, the physical endurance they showed in such positions as 'bus conductors and postmen, while calling forth lavish praises from leaders of industry, newspaper magnates, and Cabinet ministers, aroused in a large proportion of working men a sex hostility that has not yet been allayed. The times made it impossible any longer to refuse women the opportunities they had clamoured for for years. They seized these opportunities with enthusiasm, and in carrying out the unaccustomed duties thrust upon them, they demonstrated too effectually for the taste of most men that their claim to equality of opportunity in all walks of life was not ill-founded.

That capacity for disciplined activity which had always been denied women by men, but which the organisation of the Women's Social and Political Union had proved them to possess, was, as the slow years went by, put to practical use by the Government. The Women's Volunteer Reserve and the Women's Legion, two bodies organised and uniformed in the opening months of the war by voluntary effort, were given reluctant official recognition ; and as the war continued, the army, the navy, and the air force recruited corps of women to take over clerical and cookhouse duties normally performed by men of the forces.

## WARTIME FREEDOMS

Women as a whole at last felt themselves to be useful and necessary members of society in their human as well as their sex capacity. To masses of them it was a new and satisfying experience. Moreover, the majority of the million and a quarter fresh women who found their way into employment between 1915 and 1918 earned incomes considerably above any standard they could have hoped to attain before it. Women, in spite of the emotional suffering and distress caused them by the war, found their feet as human beings during the four blighting years it lasted in a way that would have taken generations of effort and adaptation in peace-time.

The strain and stress of life on the edge of death accelerated the breaking down of the old taboos in sexual matters which had been going on slowly since the passing of the Marriage and Divorce Act. Millions of young men whose experience of life was still to come, and whose expectation of death was universal, were involved in the war machine. Faced with imminent extinction, they seized what chances came of satisfying their sexual impulses. Some hastened into marriage. Others, generally wiser, frankly abandoned the conventions that had sprung up round sex—conventions that no longer had a meaning—and formed temporary, often evanescent connections in which mutual liking, even love, sometimes played a part. Uprooted from all familiar things, they found their partners among the young

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

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## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

women whom, like themselves, the war had detached from the past : girls in the uniforms of the various women's corps, girls who had taken up voluntary nursing, girls newly let loose in offices and factories. To these young women had come, suddenly and unexpectedly, twofold independence—financial, through their employment, personal, through the severance of family ties. Thousands of young women of the "protected" classes, as well as thousands more of the artisan and working-classes, left the parental home during the war years, without parental opposition, to live in rooms, in hostels, in barracks : the urgency of the national situation justified in the eyes of many a fond parent an assumption of independence in their daughters that they would have opposed with bitter hostility in days of peace ; and in many a home the absence of the father on service freed his daughters from the control he would have exercised over their comings and goings in a normal period.

If these young men, alive to-day and dead to-morrow, if these young women who, as they read the casualty lists, felt fear in their hearts, did not seize experience at once, they knew that for many of them it would elude them for ever. Sex became both precious—and unimportant : precious as a desired personal experience ; unimportant because it had no implications—except for those young women who, by accident or design, found themselves mothers of "war" babies. The birth rate of illegitimate children, which in 1907 had been thirty-nine per thousand births,

## WARTIME FREEDOMS

rose during the years 1915-18 to fifty-two per thousand births. These infants exercised the public mind a good deal, and at one time Mrs. Pankhurst tried to enlist support for a project to found an imposing orphanage for war-babies. "I was violently antagonistic," writes Dame Ethel Smyth in her memoir of her friend, "my feeling being that it was a mistake at such a time to underline the delinquencies of soldiers. . . ." That the unfortunate babies themselves might in later years find it disagreeable to be thus labelled does not appear to have occurred to either the advocate or the opponent of the scheme. Mrs. Pankhurst received so little support that she had to abandon her project ; but she herself adopted four little orphaned girls.

Men who had spent months in the filth and blood of Flanders, or the sandy wastes of the Near East, where sex sank into unimportance in face of the more urgent need of self-preservation, came on leave for a few days : to find themselves, by renewed contact with women, made once more acutely aware of desire. And all the homeland life of war-time was calculated to feed that awareness. "Give the boys on leave a good time" was the universal sentiment at home, and the good time consisted to a very large extent in consuming alcohol and enjoying sex. As a popular song of the period had it, "There's a girl for every soldier." Dancing and drinking in restaurants and night-clubs, inane theatrical shows of which women's bodies were the main attraction, passionate interludes

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

of greater or less meaning : these experiences, in an atmosphere of hectic, temporary excitement, seemed the only salvation for the over-wrought minds of serving men and their companions alike, the only means of staving off for the precious moments of freedom thoughts of the brutal stupidity of the one reality overhanging everyone : the ugly, exhausting, unequal contest between men and man-made machines of death.

## CHAPTER XIII

### POST-WAR ADJUSTMENTS

“It is possible for a woman to be virtuous, though not strictly chaste.”

CHESTERFIELD (1750).

THE war ended, and with its cessation came first a sense of intense relief, then a sense of complete aimlessness. The end, to attain which so much energy, so much devotion had been expended, had been reached: and there seemed nothing beyond. Just at the moment when those who had, as it were, been holding their breath through four grim years in the expectation that glorious life would spring up on the grave of death, human activities, human aspirations seemed to crumble into nothingness. Life that for all men and all women had been purposeful ceased to have meaning. The struggles of peace-time had to be resumed in a world far poorer than before the war: and their resumption involved greater chaos than the transition from peace to wartime conditions, because in war all energy had been directed to one end, in peace there was no longer an end, but an infinite series of conflicting, individual, national aims to be served. Those dreams of a better world,

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

a freer world, which had helped even the least idealistic of the men and women involved in the war to bear strains almost too heavy to be borne by the human mind and body, faded abruptly. That extraordinary sense of economic freedom which had been conferred on a nation that knew no unemployment for the first time in thirty years, owing to the unstinting expenditure of national wealth in pursuit of war aims, vanished like a dream with the demobilisation of the forces, the disbanding of the munition-workers.

In these new adjustments, women suffered cruelly. A year after the armistice was signed, the number of women in industry had been reduced by more than three-quarters of a million. Many of these had retired from paid work voluntarily, to return, perhaps regrettably but not too unwillingly, to the family cares they had abandoned at a moment when their work was more valuable in the world than in the home. But others, and among them many who would gladly have resumed home life had not their breadwinner been torn from them, were left in sore distress. As the men of the forces were released, they resumed their places in industry and business, and the women, whose able fulfilment of their duties had won them ecstatic praise, found themselves no longer wanted in a changed world where all the doors that had so miraculously opened to them were relentlessly closing again. From being the saviours of the nation, women

## POST-WAR ADJUSTMENTS

in employment were degraded in the public press to the position of ruthless self-seekers depriving men and their dependants of a livelihood. The woman who had no one to support her, the woman who herself had dependants, the woman who had no necessity, save that of the urge to personal independence and integrity, to earn : all of them became, in many people's minds, objects of opprobrium as violent as that meted out in the ensuing years to the returned " heroes " who found themselves metamorphosed into worthless wastrels when they too fell into unemployment.

As a result of the now forgotten triumphs of war-time, however, there remained one good thing : the vote, fought for and denied so strenuously for fifty years, was conferred on women who had reached the age of thirty by the Representation of the People Act of 1918 (youths of eighteen who had served received votes under the same act) ; and, despite the hostility that women had again to encounter in their endeavours to attain equality of economic status with men, something of the spirit that had recognised their value and their steadfastness in the war days did remain. It was evidenced in the passing of an act in December, 1918, enabling women over twenty-one to sit in the House of Commons ; in the admission of women to full membership of the University of Oxford in 1919, and in the more grudging bestowal on them by Cambridge in 1921 of the right to use the titles of the degrees they had won ;

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

in the passing of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919, which gave women access to the legal profession ; and in the opening to them of examinations for the Higher Civil Service in 1921. An act was passed in 1923 that equalised the rights of both parties in the matter of divorce—adultery by the husband was made sufficient ground for a wife's petition, as adultery by the wife had been sufficient for a husband's since the passing of the first act. An act of 1926 gave women, married or single, power to hold and dispose of both real and personal property on the same terms as men ; and ten years after women of thirty were given the vote, another act was passed giving them votes at twenty-one. In games and athletics, and in flying, women gained success—and notoriety ; and in business and the professions, though they lost some of the ground they appeared to have conquered during the war, yet they made steady progress towards a better status, a firmer recognition of their capacities and qualities. A sidelight, not without interest, on the change with which women and women's interests were coming to be regarded was the invasion by men journalists of those feminine interest pages that had formerly been regarded as women's preserve, to which men had contributed only surreptitiously, under cover of feminine pseudonyms. "Feminine" topics—cookery, dress, home decoration—are nowadays treated as seriously by men journalists as are "masculine" subjects, to whose consideration women

## POST-WAR ADJUSTMENTS

journalists are being, though somewhat grudgingly, more widely admitted.

The conclusion of the war left the sex problem more complicated than it had been before. Women's chances of marriage were lamentably reduced : three-quarters of a million Englishmen of marriageable years had died as a direct result of the struggle ; and another million had to make their way in a hostile world still suffering from the after-effects of wounds or disease. Numbers of women of the war generation accepted as husbands men of twice their age, and more ; others married men younger than themselves, thus passing on the feverish search for mates to those younger women who, in normal times, would have become the wives of these younger men. But still for thousands of women, life offered small hope of a mate of their own. At the very moment that this situation arose, there also arose, curiously enough, a much more general sense of the loss that deprivation of normal sex life means, the added joy its healthy satisfaction can give ; and probably no one person contributed more to public enlightenment on this subject than Marie Carmichael Stopes, a doctor of science who had already made her name in the scientific world by her researches into palæo-botany : her monograph, written in collaboration with R.V. Wheeler, on "The Constitution of Coal" is a standard work on the subject. Early in 1918, she brought out a little book written in simple language, entitled

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

“Married Love” which described in detail the physiological facts underlying the successful completion of the sex act. “I had written ‘Married Love,’ ” she says, “some years before it was published, but early in 1918, while the war was still raging, I felt that psychologically the time was ripe to give the public what appeared to me a sounder, more wholesome, and more complete knowledge of the intimate sex requirements of *normal* and healthy people than was anywhere available.” One would prefer a more coldly scientific, a less emotional approach to her subject ; but of her complete honesty and of her earnest desire to serve the happiness of her fellow human-beings, particularly her fellow-women, there is no doubt. The book was an immediate success, and she followed it in the autumn of the same year with another entitled “Wise Parenthood,” which gave, again in clear, simple language, the best advice available on contraception. “Married Love,” now in its twenty-first edition, went through six editions within a year of publication, and has sold something like three-quarters of a million copies ; “Wise Parenthood,” now in its nineteenth edition, has sold over six hundred thousand copies. Both books still have a sale of thousands a month.

The effect of the publication of these two books by a reputable publisher, and of their sale through reputable booksellers, was immense. That they answered to a need is evident from two things ; their large and steady sales—and as most of the copies

## POST-WAR ADJUSTMENTS

bought are certainly read by more than the purchaser, their true circulation must be many times the actual copies sold ; and the number and variety of books having similar themes that have followed them in the seventeen years since they appeared.

These two books were written expressly to help the married and those about to marry : but they were naturally read by others too. At a time when the prospects of matrimony were more remote from a larger number of women than at any time in the history of this country, women's eyes were opened to the loss they suffered through deprivation of normal sex life. The need to snatch experience as it offered did not end with the war ; and the franker attitude towards sex engendered by the stark proximity of death survived into the years that followed the war, with their sense of insecurity that was, in some ways, more poignant than the insecurity of the war days themselves. While war raged, the insecurity of imminent death hung over every man and woman ; but some day the war would end, and then, surely, security would come again for those who survived. But the end of war brought a new sense of insecurity, an insecurity that sprang from lack of any obvious object to be served by life, of any feeling of confidence in the people and the principles that were directing human society along what appeared to be an aimless track barely visible in the bog of national and international jealousies, hates and fears. The cessation of war, instead of ushering in peace and a new spirit

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

of brotherhood, brought only fresh occasions for disagreement, fresh fears of active dissension.

This sense of insecurity, of being on a quicksand, accentuated the impulse of the times towards casual sex relationships, a feverish effort to gain experience before the coming of complete chaos should end existence ; and militated against the instinct of normal times to set up relationships having the intention of permanency as their basis. Marriage itself, still, up to 1914, rarely entered into except as a permanent bond in intention, became experimental : the number of war-time marriages that failed to succeed in peace-time conditions formed good grounds for this pessimistic attitude towards the likelihood of permanency. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1923, by relieving the wife of the necessity of proving cruelty or desertion in addition to adultery, made it a simpler matter for kindly and decent couples to end unsuccessful marriages ; and the public mind, forced by war-time conditions and experience to a more direct understanding of human problems, no longer regarded the divorced woman as anything more terrible than a person who had made an unhappy experiment in living.

In this atmosphere of uncertainty, when pre-war and war-time fortunes melted like snow in sunshine, and unemployment waited grimly on wage-earners of every category, there arose among women a marked tendency to avoid motherhood : the chances of being able to provide suitably for their offspring during

## POST-WAR ADJUSTMENTS

childhood and adolescence seemed too uncertain, and the future was black with fear. Few of the women (or men) who went through the war can contemplate unmoved the prospect of their children suffering a similar experience, and the continued uncertainty of life, its lack of any apparent basis in principle filled the imaginative with an almost unconquerable dread of the coming years.

Faith in a future life, where those who had failed to find happiness in this could look for fulfilment, had ceased to have any strong hold on the minds of most thoughtful men and women long before the war broke out ; but the conditions of the actual world, despite a growing sense of instability, offered a sufficiently attractive field of useful activity, a sufficiently reasonable hope of satisfaction in the present life to make parenthood, with its mixed sacrifices and joys, seem worth while. Such vague hope of a life after death as remained, a legacy of the ardent faith of other centuries, helped to stimulate the living of a natural life in which reproduction of oneself played a vital part. But after the war, even such vague faith reached vanishing point ; and few cared deliberately to reproduce another self who might be condemned to live over again the moral disillusionment and physical suffering imposed on the war generation. The birth rate, which in 1913 was 24.1 per thousand, had fallen in 1923 to 19.7 per thousand.

This fear of parenthood appears to have been

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

peculiar to Great Britain : the greater Britains overseas, where illimitable spaces still waited to be filled with human beings, seem to have escaped this phase. Dr. Stopes, indeed, mentions in "Married Love" an interesting correspondence she had with a group of Australian women who hoped to found an institution for the "scientific insemination of women war-deprived of mates, so that though husbandless they may have the joy and sacrifice of child-bearing under properly protected conditions." Moreover, such is the remarkable resilience of the human mind, after a dozen years or so, even in over-populated Great Britain insecurity was accepted, and the wartime children, now grown adult, came to regard at least one child as the normal result of marriage. Babies, indeed, became "fashionable" among the middle-classes ; but the birth rate continued, nevertheless to fall.

Knowledge of the means of contraception, advocated in the first instance to aid the working man to raise his status by restricting his numbers, was still very much the preserve of the middle and upper classes. Popular education had given the power of reading to the people at large, but the habit of buying books, and still more of acting upon the advice they contained, remained alien to the majority of the workers. Dr. Stopes and her husband, Mr. Humphrey Verdon Roe, were the first people to attempt to convey to working women knowledge of

## POST-WAR ADJUSTMENTS

birth-control, the term most common in post-war usage for contraception—it had been coined in 1914 by its most ardent American advocate, Mrs. Margaret Sanger. In March, 1921, these pioneers opened in North London the first British birth-control clinic, under the patronage, among others, of such diverse men and women as William Archer, Arnold Bennett, Clara Butt, J. R. Clynes, Lady Constance Lytton, Sir Percy Scott and Miss Maude Royden. In the autumn of 1921, Lord Dawson of Penn advocated control of conception in an address he delivered before the Church Congress ; and about the same time the Malthusian League (which since 1913 had been issuing free to married people who signed a declaration, a leaflet giving information similar to that contained in Dr. Allbutt's booklet), opened a welfare centre at which a doctor gave birth-control instruction to poor mothers. In 1925, the Malthusian League, which had changed its name to the New Generation League, distributed over half a million leaflets advocating that the Ministry of Health should permit welfare centres run under local government auspices to give contraceptive advice if they wished to do so. This the Ministry of Health refused to do ; but that refusal cannot alone be blamed for lack of birth-control practice among working people. The conditions under which masses of them live make cleanliness—an essential corollary of hygienic birth-control—exceedingly difficult, particularly in such intimate matters ; and laziness and indifference among the

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

women make it hard to teach them, even when someone of their own class is prepared to help. For one working woman intelligent enough to accept and make use of practical advice in these matters, one meets a dozen who "can't be bothered," and who will still go through one pregnancy after another rather than take the simplest precautions or, alternatively, will compel their husbands to abstain or practise *coitus interruptus*.

The breakdown of the old taboos in regard to sex led inevitably to the disappearance of that horror of the naked body which had characterised the Victorians. Women's clothes underwent considerable modification during the war period, to enable their wearers to cope with the more active lives they were called upon to lead. Skirts that had risen from floor length to half-way between knee and ankle rose to the knee—and above it—during the years that immediately followed the war. Day dresses were made without sleeves, and as low-necked as pre-war evening gowns. Women were not merely no longer afraid to show their bodies : they deliberately adapted their clothes for this very purpose—consciously or unconsciously to advertise their urgent readiness to secure sexual experience. Women who no longer hid their bodies were compelled to care for them, and caring for them meant keeping them slim and healthy. Underclothes became thinner and fitted better—the perfecting of processes for producing

## POST-WAR ADJUSTMENTS

artificial silk cheaply placed "silk" underwear and "silk" stockings within the reach of every young woman.

Under her dress, an "advanced" girl of 1880 wore a thin calico combination garment (with a flannel one over it in winter), a bodice with rows of buttons to support one or two flannel petticoats, and an upper robe of woollen material lined throughout with flannel—and thought she was avoiding weight of clothing. The average girl of 1925 wore a shift, knickers, and slip of artificial silk (if she could not afford the real thing), a brassière and a suspender belt, and thought herself amply underclothed for the winter if she added a thin woollen vest.

The great increase in open-air pastimes, in swimming, climbing, and walking, and the sudden general realisation of the health-giving value of direct sunlight on the bare skin were other factors in this urge to nakedness. Sunbathing became the accepted accompaniment of water bathing, whether in the sea or in open-air tanks. In "*Love's Coming of Age*," Edward Carpenter says, "Lately in one of our northern towns, the boys and men bathing in a public pool set apart by the corporation for the purpose were—though forced to wear some kind of covering—kept till nine o'clock at night before they were allowed to go into the water—lest in the full daylight, Mrs. Grundy should behold any portion of their bodies!" Any local authority acting so ludicrously to-day would be ridiculed in the press.

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

Nudist colonies, where men and women could spend holidays together living a more or less sophisticated "simple life," and indulging in folk dancing, rhythmic exercises, and athletic sports, though execrated by some, helped others to a healthy attitude towards nudity—and sex: for the execrators hated these experiments in simple living because, they said, the colonists indulged their sexual passions. It is to be hoped they did: sex is one of the fundamental elements of life, and without it no life is simple or normal. Fear of sex, fear of nakedness have poisoned life too long, and every experiment that helps to exorcise these twin fears from the human mind is to be praised.

In no sphere has the change in the attitude to sex been more profound than in relation to venereal diseases. Probably it would be impossible to-day to find a single medical man who would echo the words of Mr. Solly, a single layman who would echo those of Mrs. Butler quoted in an earlier chapter. Women's better economic status and increasing sexual freedom have made it unnecessary for the average man to seek prostitutes. The dying away of shame in sexual matters is leading to the fading away of that accompanying shame about sexual diseases which, since their nature and effects began to be better understood, has been one of the chief difficulties in the way of their effective treatment and diminution. So long as men and women are constrained by shame to

## POST-WAR ADJUSTMENTS

conceal these diseases until they reach a stage where concealment (or self-deception) is no longer possible, they can never be completely eradicated. Once all sense of shame can be dissociated from sex, it will be dissociated also from sexual diseases: save in so far as in that day, a man or woman will be ashamed to pass them on. Already, increased knowledge of their existence and of their baneful effects makes every man and woman with the smallest sense of responsibility take precautions to avoid them, by avoiding commercialised sex, and, if they have been unfortunate enough to fall victims all the same, to seek medical advice and cure at once. As for the doctor, his aim is to cure, or at least mitigate disease, without reference to its nature. He no longer sets himself up as a judge of morals, and to him a case of venereal disease is one which requires at least as prompt and efficient treatment as any other.

Before the committees and the Royal Commission that enquired into the working of the Contagious Diseases Acts, the entire lack of provision for the treatment of these diseases, except among men of the forces and among the women who were brought under the acts, was continually emphasised, one potent reason being the reluctance of a godly public to subscribe to hospitals where venereal diseases were treated. The same lack of treatment facilities was emphasised by the Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases called together in 1913; but the fundamental change of attitude towards these diseases is strikingly

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

apparent in the report issued in 1917 by the fifteen commissioners, three of whom were women. By the terms of reference, no return to the policy or provisions of the Contagious Diseases Acts was to be regarded as falling within the scope of the enquiry; but the commissioners nevertheless placed it on record that the evidence they received "points to the conclusion that no advantage would accrue from a return to the system of those acts. So far from this being the case it is to be noted that the great improvement as regards venereal diseases in the Navy and the Army has taken place since the repeal of the acts." The report is concerned exclusively with the seriousness of the diseases and the urgent need for their effective treatment, no matter who the sufferer and by what means acquired. It recommended that "measures should be taken to render the best modern treatment of venereal diseases readily available to the whole community, and the arrangements should be such that persons affected by these diseases will have no hesitation in taking advantage of facilities for treatment which are afforded," that organisation of treatment should be in the hands of local authorities and should be free, that institutional treatment should be provided as far as possible at general (not special) hospitals, and that the expensive drugs necessary to the effective treatment of syphilis should, under proper safeguards, be supplied free to medical practitioners.

It also recommended that all advertisements of

## POST-WAR ADJUSTMENTS

remedies for venereal diseases should be prohibited : “ the direct and indirect effects of these diseases upon the race are so grave and the deception practised upon the public is so extensive as, in our opinion, to justify repressive measures. We should have advocated legal provisions making the treatment of venereal disease by unqualified persons a penal offence, but we recognise the practical difficulties in securing the effective operation of such a law in present circumstances.”

In striking contrast to the attitude of the earlier reports is one paragraph in particular of this report : after recording that the evidence leads to the conclusion that there is a larger percentage of disease by inheritance among illegitimate than among legitimate children, it continues, “ We do not, however, see how it is practicable to apply special legislation in the case of these illegitimate children or their parents. It can only be hoped that if treatment centres are established and worked successfully, their benefits will extend to the advantage of the illegitimate and their parents, and that the increased knowledge of the evil and of the remedy may at length reach this class as well as the lawfully married.” The Victorian forerunners of these twentieth-century commissioners must have stirred uneasily in their graves at the expression of these sacrilegious views. Possibly one contributory cause of the Commission’s attitude was the discovery, when conscription came into force in 1916, of the large number of respectable

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

men and women living in what the Commission called "habitual concubinage." The authorities found themselves compelled to give the same recognition in regard to allowances to the "unmarried wives" in these unions, and their children, as to legally married women. The circles printed on a wife's allowance papers earned for these documents the name "ring papers," and were popularly supposed to have a connection with the wedding-ring of lawful marriage. Alas for popular mysticism, they had no such symbolic meaning: they were intended solely to accommodate the imprint of the post office date stamp at each payment, and appeared alike on the papers of married and unmarried wives.

As a result of this commission's report, an act was passed immediately forbidding treatment of venereal diseases except by registered medical practitioners, thus going beyond what the commissioners had felt able to recommend. Within a few years, nearly two hundred treatment centres had been opened, and special institutions had been established for the care of infected girls who might become professional prostitutes, and for the care of pregnant women infected. Drugs are supplied free to qualified medical men; and education of the public, including prominent notices in public lavatories setting forth the nearest places at which free treatment is available, has ever since been carried on by the British Social Hygiene Council (formerly the National Council for

## POST-WAR ADJUSTMENTS

Combating Venereal Diseases) with the help of a Government grant. The total number of cases applying at the treatment centres fell from 105,185 in 1920 to 73,222 in 1924. The Royal Commission laid stress upon the fact that "all experience shows that after a war an excessive incidence of disease is certain to occur," and though there are no comparable pre-war figures that can be quoted to demonstrate the validity of this anticipation, the remarkable drop in fresh applications for help appears to confirm it.\* For in spite of the sexual freedom that reigned during the war, not every man on leave came into contact with willing young women of his own kind. Short leaves spent in foreign cities where regulation of prostitution gave an illusion of safety led to experiments in commercialised sex by young men with money in their pockets and nothing to do, who would have hesitated many times before making such experiments at a normal time; and the utter aimlessness and friendlessness of men of the colonial forces on leave in the motherland exposed them to the equal risks of unregulated prostitution in London. But the openness with which these diseases had to be treated in the army during the war, when hundreds of thousands of men were under arms who in the ordinary course of events would have lived out their

\* Dame Ethel Smyth, in her memoir of Mrs. Pankhurst, states that in 1921 "syphilis was raging in Canada," and that Mrs. Pankhurst, who was on a lecture tour in the Dominion, initiated the public campaign against venereal diseases in that country by addressing a huge audience in Montreal on the subject. The audience "listened spell-bound."

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

civilian lives far from military discipline and temptations, helped to spread knowledge of them, of their danger, of the possibility of taking precautions against contracting them, and of the steps necessary to their cure.

## CHAPTER XIV

### FRUITS OF KNOWLEDGE

“ What any persons may freely do with respect to sexual relations should be deemed to be an unimportant and purely private matter, which concerns no one but themselves. If children are the result, then indeed commences a set of important duties towards the children. . . . But to have held any human being responsible to other people and to the world for the fact itself, apart from this consequence, will one day be thought one of the superstitions and barbarisms of the infancy of the human race.”

JOHN STUART MILL (1854)

“ Love is not to be bought, in any sense of the words ; its silken wings are instantly shrivelled up when anything beside a return in kind is sought.”

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT (1792).

WOMEN have gained political freedom. They not only vote, they sit in Parliament and have held Cabinet appointments. They have gained the right of entry into the professions. They have yet to scale the heights of a judgeship or secure the post of physician to the King (perhaps the accession of a queen regnant may see that change effected) ; but they can and do make their way to honourable eminence in the legal and medical professions. They can live their own lives, and if there are still some to criticise the freedom with which they love, there

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

are enough sympathisers to give them the warmth of friendship and understanding that they need.

Marriage in legal or extra-legal form remains the choice of the majority. But virginity is no longer the dowry a bride is expected to bring with her. Rather is the tendency in the contrary direction. The bride who has had no experience of sex, at least with her bridegroom, if not yet the exception, is far from being the rule. Stead's hysterical enthusiasm for the preciousness of virginity in itself would fall on incredulous, slightly amused ears to-day, when the woman who has attained, say, the age of thirty and remained a virgin is rightly regarded as a poor specimen of womanhood, as something almost unclean. Changed conceptions of the values of life, of love, and of sex hitherto current among the few are spreading to the many, with a steady gain of psychological and physiological health. Knowledge of contraception has placed the woman on an equality with the man : the sex act, which has rarely been of paramount importance to the man, has ceased to have more importance to the woman than she cares to give it. She no longer allows herself to respond to the urgency of her physical sex needs with fear in her heart—married or unmarried, she can choose the moment of maternity, and becomes, indeed, a free agent. For it is her justified dread of unwanted motherhood that has held her in servitude through the centuries. She can take sex more lightly because it no longer has fears ; she can take it more deeply

## FRUITS OF KNOWLEDGE

because she can give herself freely without after-thought. Whole realms of dark fears and obsessions have been banished from her spirit by knowledge of the means of contraception.

Not as imagined by the pioneers who first preached it will the equal standard for men and women come. They, in their unreal idealism, sought the abolition of the double standard by compelling men to the same austerity that men had demanded of women—an austerity natural to some temperaments, but intolerable to others. They conceived a state of society attainable in which both men and women would be completely chaste outside marriage. They would have been horrified at the idea of a world in which birth-control would make equality of sexual freedom possible. "The regulation of the passions is not always wisdom," wrote Mary Wollstonecraft. "On the contrary, it should seem that one reason why men have superior judgement and more fortitude than women is undoubtedly this, that they give a freer scope to the grand passions, and by more frequently going astray enlarge their minds." She would have approved of the new sex ethic: by it none is compelled to freedoms he does not need; none is compelled to chains that are unbearable. It offers no obstacle to the practice of strict monogamy or complete chastity by those whose needs are thus satisfied.

The idea that physical infidelity means the end—even the desire for the end—of an established relationship is dying fast among women—men have

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

always known that it need imply no such thing. All men, even the chapest, and most women, pine, generally in the secret places of their hearts, for change, for something different in sexual experience. This inclination to infidelity would seem to be recognised even in Christian circles, since one of the first phrases in the daily prayer of the Mothers' Union runs, "Help us to be faithful wives." If the believing Christian wife needs to pray daily that she may remain faithful to the vows made before God and man, it seems clear that what is demanded of her is more than human nature unaided can be expected to fulfil.

A new love gives new colour to life, but, if the basic relationship is sound, it will appear the more valuable in its serene familiarity by contrast with the fire of the unfamiliar. Once men and women accept, in themselves and each other, the fact of this elemental longing, and its natural consequences, they learn that true love and understanding need not be lessened, but can be increased by new experience. The English divorce system, however, remains a relic of a period of sexual manners which assumed that infidelity necessarily meant a change of loyalties. Divorce will always be the only remedy for incurable marital unhappiness: but much marital unhappiness to-day is due to the survival of outworn ideas on sexual relations, and will disappear with a saner approach to the realities of sexual life. That time, too, will find a more rational basis for the law of divorce: the fundamental idea underlying the present divorce

## FRUITS OF KNOWLEDGE

law in England is unsound. What should be primarily an arrangement between two people for the rescinding of an unsatisfactory agreement is, in law, refused if it can be proved that such an arrangement exists. Only if the petitioning partner can convince the court that he or she does not want a divorce is a divorce granted. Proved collusion is the one fatal bar to the success of a petition.

The laws relating to marriage need an equally sweeping change. It was the fashion among the suffragettes to proclaim that marriage was a man-made institution. It seems at least conceivable that it was woman-made: certainly that would appear to be the opinion of Westermarck, who wrote: "The history of human marriage is the history of a relation in which women have been gradually triumphing over the passions, the prejudices, and the selfish interests of men." Even more probably, however, marriage developed because both men and women found that it worked better than any other system of sexual relationship, and that, further, monogamy worked better than any other system of marriage. Most human beings like a certain element of security in their lives, and the person, man or woman, preferring to take the chance of casual satisfaction of their sexual needs rather than form a settled relationship with some other one congenial person is rare. It is not monogamy that is at fault: it is the ideas that have grown up round it: the idea of indissolubility, the idea of absolute physical fidelity between the

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

partners, the idea, above all, that a woman conveys a favour on a man by marrying him for which he must pay by keeping her all the days of her life. Everything in and around us changes. Within the happiest and most satisfactory marriage, there are always changes of relationship—generally slow and subtle, sometimes sharp and sudden. Two human beings, healthy, well-disposed, and loving, who are perfectly mated in their twenties may find one another unsatisfactory in their thirties, simply through the divergence of personality that has attended their developing experience. The advent of another sexual relationship for one or both of the partners may very well be what is needed to save the existing relationship: yet the English divorce law would have it that this potentially saving influence is the one reason above all others for divorce. The jealousy that would spoil such salvation must be banished from sexual life. Jealousy is an utterly wasteful emotion—it poisons every relationship in which it rises, and it never brings together the two beings between whom it has come, it merely alienates them further. The ready acceptance of new loves, new loyalties in the life of husband, wife, or lover is an essential part of a revised sex ethic.

At the present day, a great many women still delight in the sense of gratification they receive from the actual celebration of a wedding ceremony: it forces public recognition of the fact that they have achieved a partner who thinks well enough of them to be

## FRUITS OF KNOWLEDGE

prepared to keep them in exchange for their sexual favours. Only those women who hate dependency, or for whom sex is an intimately private experience, hate this publicity and its implications. That their number is increasing is demonstrated by the steady growth in the number of register office weddings. To some men, the marriage ceremony and the subsequent wearing of a ring by their wives gives their sexually exhibitionist impulses a peculiar satisfaction. To others, the thought of going through a ceremony of marriage is abhorrent : sex is to them a matter of such privacy that the public exhibition of their intention to copulate is loathsome.

“There are many peoples,” said Westermarck, “among whom true conjugal life does not begin before a child is born,” and such a basis for matrimony seems a reasonable one. Even in some parts of Europe, it is still the custom for a marriage to take place only after there is a certainty that it will be fruitful. In a condition of public morality in which sexual relationships occupied their rightful position—that of private acts with no public significance whatever—parenthood might well be the reason for marriage : unless indeed the care of the young were taken over by the state. But the day when parents, and especially mothers, will in the majority be willing to relinquish contact with the children they have begotten is remote : the least maternal woman generally desires to observe the growth of the child she has borne, to discover what kind of human being she has produced ; and

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

the sense of fatherhood, though less dominant than that of motherhood, is strong in most normal men.

Side by side with such a change in the function of marriage would have to come a change in our attitude towards abortion, and in the law relating to it. Some women, however prudent they may be, seem unable to evade conception. These, if they did not want to assume the responsibilities of parenthood, should be enabled to obtain abortion under proper medical conditions. This is an idea at which many believers in birth-control balk. Indeed, to-day some of those who were formerly warm advocates of contraception are beginning to shake their heads with the orthodox over the falling birth-rate, and the diminution of population that is due to take place within a measurable period of years. As there is no doubt that in the present social system this country is over-populated, and as, even under a more equitable system, the country could well flourish with many fewer inhabitants than it has to-day, I cannot feel that the time has yet come, I doubt whether I should feel a time had ever come, when intelligently used contraception, intelligently used abortion was not a prime necessity for the health and happiness of women.

There are at the present time two contrary tendencies : the fully developed impulse to freedom in matters of sex ; and a retrograde influence at work trying to force women back to the position they

## FRUITS OF KNOWLEDGE

occupied a century ago. Among the oddest spectacles of the day is that of young women dressed in black shirts, standing on the pavement edges offering for sale the literature of the fascists, one of whose aims is to deprive women of the very freedom which makes it possible for them to stand unmolested as they do. A generation ago, their mothers stood on the same spots, derided and abused, selling suffrage literature in which was advocated that freedom their daughters now seem anxious to lose. One wonders that they are not, with more justification than the suffragettes who preceded them, told to go home and mind the baby by the successors of the working men whose favourite onslaught on their mothers was couched in these terms. There is certainly something definitely inappropriate in this presence in public places of women who have attached themselves to a system of thought that has reverted to the teaching that woman's place is exclusively the home. Perhaps they think there is no danger to them, even if their party gains the ascendancy. They are mistaken: in Germany, where sex freedom and sex equality were realities under the Weimar constitution, women are being squeezed out of public life as relentlessly as the Jews. It is true that freedom of any kind was a mushroom growth in Germany, that the idea of freedom is an age-long heritage of the English, and that the freedom of Englishwomen has been built up by slow stages and steady persistence and was not gained in a night; but it would vanish, along with

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

every other freedom, should a fascist régime be introduced.

But despite these odd young women (they are few) and the line of thought they represent, it is permissible to hope that in this country at least, where changes come more slowly than in others, but are all the deeper for that, there will be no serious reversion to eighteenth-century ideas and nineteenth-century ideals where women are concerned. The widespread influence of Freud's psychological theories, which have made so great a difference to our approach to and understanding of sex, would seem to make another violent swing of the pendulum back to repression impossible. That the gradual resumption of a more normal equilibrium in the numbers of young women and young men is having a bearing on manners there is no doubt : there is no longer that hectic search for experience at any cost which marked the ten years that immediately followed the war ; and the adoption of a more demure style in much of women's clothes speaks of the same change. But nevertheless there is abroad a fundamental sense of the personal importance, the social unimportance of sex : the mother who said, "I do not wish my daughter to be a one-man woman" spoke the wisdom of the mothers of to-day. Instead of allowing the pendulum to swing between sexual licence and sexual repression, we have to-day a reasonable chance of bringing it to rest at sexual sanity through a more rational attitude towards sex.

A few months ago a popular monthly magazine

## FRUITS OF KNOWLEDGE

published a serious article by a well-known novelist insisting that it is not exceptional, but on the contrary normal and natural, for a woman in her later thirties, however happily married, to fall in love anew and take a lover without detriment to the older settled relationship. Twenty years ago no editor of a magazine for general family circulation would have risked the publication of such a view, however carefully and conscientiously stated. To-day a saner outlook on sex is penetrating more and more deeply into the public consciousness. It is being more and more widely realised that there is fundamentally little difference in the working of the sex urge in men and in women ; that the differences one encounters, like differences in brain power and moral stability, are matters of individual temperament rather than of sex. It is natural for a woman when she has attained maturity of mental growth to respond to a new stimulus of her matured emotions. This tendency to a re-birth of the erotic urge in the later thirties and the forties has been a matter of common observation in men—many a “confirmed bachelor” submits himself at last, round about the age of forty, to the pains and pleasures of marriage and paternity ; and the married man of forty who has not felt his heart bound again in the presence of a newly desired woman probably does not exist. All but an insignificant minority of women have in the past sternly suppressed even the conscious realisation of this urge. A large proportion of men have done the same.

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

To-day, when a deepening understanding of the havoc wrought by the suppression of normal sexual instincts is accompanied by a growing appreciation of the comparative unimportance of physical fidelity now that birth-control is possible, men and women alike are experiencing a revivifying of their emotional life and their physical vitality at an age when their grand-parents were settled into the boredom of middle-age.

This natural tendency is one that is more and more exploited by novelists. Youthful novel readers used to be in the majority, and for them novelists wrote of the loves and adventures of the young. The gradual lengthening of life and the reduction of the birth-rate has altered the proportions of the population at different ages, so that to-day the majority of novel readers are no longer youthful—at any rate in years. The exploits of the 'teens and early twenties do not interest them ; but the psychological and erotic adventures of the thirties and forties do. The result is a considerably higher average age for the heroes and heroines of the novels of to-day than of those of yesterday ; and this tendency to advance the age of characters in novels in its turn serves to focus more attention on actual experiences among those who have left behind their first youth. Mrs. Florence Barclay was one of the first to realise this change of age in the novel-reading public. Her heroines are never under thirty ; and her books had an instant and astounding success. The fashion she

## FRUITS OF KNOWLEDGE

set has been followed by other writers who have brought a psychological insight she did not possess to the revelation of mature experience.

Perhaps the most potent influence in the development of sex sanity is co-education of boys and girls. Among the workers, boys and girls have never been segregated as they have been, and to a large extent still are, among those who are better off. In consequence, working men and women have never felt that obsession by, that fear of sex which have been the bane of middle-class lives. Since an illegitimate baby has never been an unconquerable disgrace to a working girl, even fear of the consequences has had far less repressive effect among the workers than among their more comfortably off sisters, for whom an illegitimate baby still means hopeless disgrace, save where a mother has conceived it with deliberate intent. In that case, society may try to regard her as disgraced ; but she, being unconscious of the slur, will not accept society's verdict.

The child whose innocent enquiries about its arrival in this world have from the beginning been honestly and unselfconsciously answered is proof against the moral shock that even yet comes to many a tenderly reared boy and girl on being crudely introduced to the facts by some "knowing" school companion or "indelicate" servant. "Truth may always be told to children, if it be told gravely," said

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

Mary Wollstonecraft ; "it is the immodesty of affected modesty that does all the mischief. . . . If, indeed, children could be kept entirely from improper company, we should never allude to any such subjects ; but as this is impossible it is best to tell them the truth, especially as such information, not interesting them, will make no impression on their imagination." It should be impossible for girls of nineteen or twenty to be still unaware of the manner of sexual intercourse. But such knowledge does not come of itself—it is possible for a perfectly normal girl to be totally unaware of the reason for the local physical sensations that afflict her. To learn the truth of sex only in the late 'teens imparts so horrifying a sense of desecration of all personal privacy that a sensitive girl may be filled for months with an appalling consciousness of self-loathing—a state of mind from which some women never recover. Psychologists still come across women who imagine that couples go through the marriage ceremony and that children arrive thereafter, as Providence thinks fit, in some way which they have never attempted to elucidate. The shock of learning how a child is born, great as it is, is generally less overwhelming than the discovery of the extreme physical intimacy of sexual intercourse. That women with sexual experience, that women actually pregnant can still be under the delusion that birth is effected by some natural equivalent of a Caesarean operation is scarcely credible, but is nevertheless true.

## FRUITS OF KNOWLEDGE

The child whose enquiries about sexual matters have been answered frankly can receive only good from co-education. Boys and girls who work and play and bathe together have an understanding of one another that grows naturally with their growth. The body of a boy to a girl, of a girl to a boy is no mystery, and though the period of adolescence creates a sex division of the children even in a co-educational school, this is due to a natural instinct, not a false repression. This natural period of division into sexes, passed through without comment, brings them together again equally naturally when the disturbing years are over.

Sir James Fitzjames Stephen, already quoted more than once (but he is so enlightening) wrote in 1874, “Are boys and girls to be educated indiscriminately, and to be instructed in the same things? Are boys to learn to sew, to keep house, and to cook, and are girls to play at cricket, to row, and be drilled like boys? I cannot argue with a person who says ‘Yes.’” Yet that is what a great many people would say to-day. He has actually caught the spirit of the co-education movement: to give both boys and girls the chance of developing together whatever natural aptitudes they may have—the boys to sew if it suits them, the girls to play cricket. Many a home would be far happier than it is if both the man and the woman in it could cook and sew. No man regards it as dishonourable to be a chef: why should he think it beneath him to cook a rice-pudding in the home?

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

Long before the advent of the first co-educational school, Mary Wollstonecraft wrote: “To improve both sexes they ought, not only in private families, but in public schools to be educated together. . . . Marriage will never be held sacred till women, by being brought up with men, are prepared to be their companions rather than their mistresses. . . . Were boys and girls permitted to pursue the same studies together, those graceful decencies might early be inculcated which produce modesty without those sexual distinctions that taint the mind. Lessons of politeness, and that formularey of decorum which treads on the heels of falsehood, would be rendered useless by habitual propriety of behaviour.”

She also envisaged a system of education in which the children should be their own judges in the matter of crimes and punishments. This “would be an admirable method of fixing sound principles of justice in the mind, and might have the happiest effect on the temper, which is very early soured or irritated by tyranny.”

Truthfulness to the child, openness to the adolescent, the banishment of fear and shame in the adult: will the complete sexual freedom that must come of these things exorcise the unusual forms of sexuality in which alone people we now call abnormal can find satisfaction? There seems a reasonable hope that in the course of generations it must, for many of these idiosyncrasies arise from misconceptions, misunder-

## FRUITS OF KNOWLEDGE

standings, repressions in childhood and youth. In any case, once sex itself ceases to be regarded as shameful, its variant manifestations will earn not contumely, but indifference, or at most compassion. It is the "sinfulness" of sexual abnormalities that is in many instances their attraction. Take away the idea of sinfulness, and substitute the idea that these manifestations are merely eccentric and not specially interesting ways of achieving a normal function—and they would often lose their attraction. Those beings who still needed some eccentricity of behaviour to achieve satisfaction would readily find partners of like mind in a condition of society in which there were no sex taboos—and no commercialised sex; and harm would be done to none, but only good to the exceptional few.

If we could eradicate jealousy, allow women to achieve truly equal economic status, and banish all idea of payment in relation to sex, then also that disintegrating force in sex relationships, sexual hostility, would disappear. The conditions of marriage, improved as they are to-day, still provide a fruitful soil for this poisonous weed. It is the offspring of that attitude of woman that made her withhold herself in order to secure, as payment for her favours, those necessities and luxuries which she could obtain only through the medium of man, and is still to-day the source of the frustration of many sex relationships.

Greater knowledge, more directness are rendering, and will increasingly render, sex a source of less

## TOWARDS SEX FREEDOM

distress. But, so long as human beings have the inclination to choose one man, one woman rather than another, happiness cannot be guaranteed to the most enlightened. This applies perhaps more particularly to women who, by the physiological conditions of sex, must ultimately wait on man's pleasure. There are a certain number of men and women to whom complete promiscuity is the ideal. In a state of society from which sexual disease has been banished and in which sexual relationships occupy their rightful place—private acts of no public significance—these people will meet and satisfy one another. Provided the commercial aspect has been utterly divorced from sex (and all considerations other than that of an equal exchange must be excluded before sex can become a source of unmixed good), the sex life of such people would be thoroughly healthy. Only a small proportion of sexual intercourse, in marriage or out of it, is even to-day entirely without the taint of buying and selling. Many a woman who considers herself "free" still expects a present, a dinner, a week-end trip as the price of what should be a free exchange between two equal beings.

But, though the human being who goes through life without desiring more than once is rare, genuine preference for complete promiscuity is also at present exceptional. For the majority, desire goes out to a few particular persons. Such individual desire, reciprocated between two equals, gives the greatest measure of sex happiness ; denied it brings pain no

## FRUITS OF KNOWLEDGE

rational theories of sexual ethics can remedy. Men have sung for hundreds of years the bitterness of unrequited love. The realisation by women of their capacity for spontaneous sexual desire has brought with it, as well as greater understanding of life and its possibilities, a knowledge of unhappiness they did not possess before—or sensed but dimly. This desire towards the individual, mixed up as it is with the woman's need to choose a father for her children, would seem in nature to be more deep-seated in women than in men. It is even possible that, if women were untrammelled both economically and sexually, they would allow themselves to feel such marked preferences more freely than they dare in present circumstances. Nevertheless, many, perhaps most, lives would be serener if desire towards particular individuals could be eliminated, and a general satisfaction in sexual intercourse with any reasonably likable and attractive person could be substituted.

Saner sex education, clearer understanding may bring that to pass. If it does, the human race will have lost the impulse that has driven it to most of its poetical and much of its musical expression. But better than poetry, better than music is the even tenor of a multitude of lives delivered from frustration.



## INDEX

**ABORTION**, 226  
 Acton, Dr. William, 117  
**Age of Consent**, 138 *seq.*  
 Albert, Prince Consort, 19, 115  
 Allbutt, Dr. H. A., 108, 209  
 "Analytical Review, The," 4  
 Anderson, Dr. Elizabeth Garrett:  
     See Garrett, Dr. Elizabeth  
 Anderson, Dr. Louisa Garrett,  
     192  
 "Annual Register, The," 19, 83,  
     165  
 Anti-Contagious Diseases Acts  
     Association, National, 123  
 Archer, William, 209  
 Armstrong, Eliza, 146  
 Arnold, Dr. Thomas, 2, 58, 59, 71  
 Austen, Jane, 22, 29

**BARBAULD, ANNA LETITIA**, 9  
 Barclay, Florence, 230  
 Barr, Dr. John Coleman, 129  
 Beale, Dorothea, 63, 64, 81  
 Bedford College for Ladies, 60  
 Begg, Faithfull, 172  
 Behn, Aphra, 13  
 Bennett, Arnold, 209  
 Besant, Annie, 91, 102 *seq.*, 176  
 Besant, Rev. Frank, 104  
 Bethell, Sir Richard (Lord Westbury), 158 *seq.*  
 Bible Society, British and  
     Foreign, 37  
 Bigamy, Mr. Justice Maule on,  
     156  
 Birth Control, 94 *seq.*, 181, 204,  
     208 *seq.*, 226, 230  
 Birth rate, 207, 230  
 Birth rate of illegitimate children, 196  
 Blackwell, Dr. Elizabeth, 75 *seq.*,  
     164  
 Blood, Fanny, 13  
 Boer War, The (1880-1), 83

Booth, Bramwell, 146 *seq.*  
 Booth, Charles, 88  
 Booth, "General," 146  
 Bradlaugh, Charles, 102 *seq.*, 176  
 Bramwell, Lord Justice, 106  
 Brett, Lord Justice, 106  
 British and Foreign Bible  
     Society, 37  
 British Medical Register, 75, 77,  
     78, 108  
 British Social Hygiene Council,  
     216  
 Brontë, Anne, 50  
 Brontë, Charlotte, 30, 60, 64, 109  
 Brougham, Lord, 156  
 Browne, Phyllis, on "What  
     Girls Can Do," 85  
 Brussels, Brothels of, 139, 140  
 Burke, Edmund, 4  
 Burney, Fanny, 15, 54  
 Buss, Frances Mary, 63, 81  
 Butler, Canon George, 59, 64,  
     119 *seq.*  
 Butler, Josephine, 59, 69 *seq.*,  
     119 *seq.*, 138, 142, 212  
 Butler, Samuel, 25, 40, 186  
 Butt, Dame Clara, 209

**CARDWELL, LORD**, 129  
 Carlile, Richard, 100, 103  
 Carpenter, Edward, 183, 211  
 Cat-and-Mouse Act, 178  
 Centlivre, Susannah, 13  
 Cheltenham Ladies' College, 64  
 Chesterfield, Lord, 14, 32  
 Children, Custody of, 150 *seq.*  
 Christian Knowledge, Society for  
     the Propagation of, 126  
 Civil Service, Women in, 84  
 Clergy Daughters' School,  
     Cowan Bridge, 64  
 Clough, Anne Jemima, 24, 59,  
     69 *seq.*, 83  
 Clough, Arthur, 59, 71

# INDEX

Clynes, J. R., 209  
Cobbe, Frances Power, 65  
Cockburn, Sir Alexander, Lord  
Chief Justice, 80, 106  
Co-education, 233  
Consent, Age of, 138 *seq.*  
Contagious Diseases Acts, 41, 45,  
70, 72, 110 *seq.*, 138, 142, 165,  
213 *seq.*  
Contagious Diseases Acts, Ladies'  
National Association for the  
Repeal of, 123  
Contraception, 94 *seq.*, 181, 204,  
208 *seq.*, 226, 230  
Cooper, Daniel, 118, 123  
Coote, W. A., 148  
Cranworth, Lord, 157, 158  
Crawford, Mrs., 83  
Crimean War, The, 85, 124, 167  
Criminal Investigations, Sir  
Howard Vincent, Director of,  
140, 143  
Criminal Law Amendment Bill,  
141 *seq.*  
Custody of Infants, 150 *seq.*  
  
"DAILY NEWS, THE," 83  
Davies, Emily, 59, 65 *seq.*, 79,  
164, 165  
Davies-Colley, Eleanor, 180  
Davison, Emily, 177  
Dawson of Penn, Lord, 209  
Deaconesses, Order of, 87  
Death Duty, 168  
Delirium tremens, 129  
Diseases, Industrial, 44  
Diseases, Venereal, 32, 44 *seq.*,  
110 *seq.*, 212 *seq.*  
Disraeli, Benjamin, 164  
Divorce, 10, 155 *seq.*, 202, 222  
*seq.*  
Divorce Act, The Marriage and,  
1857, 55, 156 *seq.*, 164  
Dixie, Lady Florence, 83  
Dufferin, Helen Countess of, 152  
Duncan, Emily, 180  
Dunlap, Superintendent, 42, 141  
  
EDUCATION, WOMEN'S, 2, 10, 23,  
58 *seq.*, 233  
Ellis, Havelock, 183  
Enabling Act, The, 1875, 80  
  
" Encyclopædia Britannica,"  
162  
Equity, courts of, 164  
Estate Duty, Harcourt's, 168  
  
FACTORY ACT, THE, 1891, 84  
Fanshawe, the Lady Anne, 95  
Fascists, women, 227  
Fawcett, Prof. Henry, 71, 72,  
84, 163  
Fawcett, Dame Millicent, 72,  
84, 148, 162  
Fiction, Victorian, 24 *seq.*, 185  
*seq.*  
Flexner, Abraham, 43, 44  
Franco-Prussian War, The, 84  
Freethought Publishing Company, 102 *seq.*  
Freud, Sigmund, 184 *seq.*  
Friends, Society of, 124  
Fuseli, Henry, 4, 6  
  
GARRETT, DR. ELIZABETH, 59,  
65, 66, 72, 77, 79, 84, 180, 192  
Garrett, Newson, 59, 65, 77, 165  
Gaskell, Elizabeth Cleghorn, 24  
George IV., 18, 19  
Girls' Public Day School Trust,  
The, 63, 81  
Girton, 67, 82  
Gladstone, W. E., 91, 127, 157,  
167  
Godwin, William, 7 *seq.*  
Grant, Anne, 1  
Gonorrhœa, 129  
Grantley, Earl, 152  
Great War, The, 190 *seq.*  
Grey, Sir Edward (Earl Grey of  
Falloden), 174 *seq.*  
Grey, John, of Dilston, 69  
Grote, George, 162  
Grote, Harriet, 162  
Guardianship of Infants Act,  
The, 1886, 154  
Gurney, Russell, Q.C., 164  
  
HAMMOND, J. L., AND BARBARA,  
33, 36  
Handyside, Dr., 79  
Harcourt's Estate Duty, 168  
Hardy, Thomas, 40  
Herbert, Lord, 113

# INDEX

Herbert, Mr. Sidney, 85  
Hewett, Prescott, 117  
Hill, Berkeley, M.B., 45

ILLEGITIMACY, 150, 182, 196, 215  
Imlay, Captain Gilbert, 5 *seq.*  
Inchbald, Elizabeth, 8  
Income tax, 167 *seq.*  
Industrial diseases, 44  
Infants Custody Acts, 155  
Inglis, Dr. Elsie, 192

JACQUES, S., *alias* MUSSABINI, 146 *seq.*  
Jameson, Anna, 85  
Jarrett, Rebecca, 146 *seq.*  
Jenner, Sir William, 110, 136  
Jex-Blake, Dr. Sophia, 79  
Johnson, Joseph, 3, 4, 7

KENNEY, ANNIE, 173 *seq.*  
King's and Queen's College of Physicians, Dublin, 80  
Kingsborough, Lady, 3  
Kingsley, Rev. Charles, 82  
Knowlton, Robert, 100, 102 *seq.*

LADIES' NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE REPEAL OF THE CONTAGIOUS DISEASES ACTS, 123  
Lady Margaret Hall, 74  
"Lady" Newspaper, 83  
Lloyd George, David, 179  
London, University of, 65, 77, 80  
London School of Medicine for Women, 79, 80  
London Secular Society, 103  
Lopez, Mr. Justice, 147, 149  
Lugard, Lady, 83  
Lytton, Lady Constance, 209  
Lord Chief Justice, The (Sir Alexander Cockburn), 80, 106

MAGISTRATE, FIRST WOMAN, 180  
"Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon," 148  
Malthus, Thomas R., 96 *seq.*, 108  
Malthusian League, 107, 209  
Manchester Suffrage Society, 172  
Manley, Mary, 13  
Marriage, 12 *seq.*, 18 *seq.*, 47 *seq.*, 98, 186 *seq.*, 203, 220 *seq.*

Marriage and Divorce Act, The, 1857, 55, 156 *seq.*, 164, 195  
Married Women's Property, 161 *seq.*  
Married Women's Property Acts, 164 *seq.*, 172  
Martineau, Harriet, 83, 123, 170  
Matrimonial Causes Act, 1923, 202, 206  
Maule, Mr. Justice, 156  
Maurice, Rev. F. D., 28, 59, 61, 87, 132, 164, 183  
Maurice, Mary, 61  
Medical Register, British, 75, 77, 78, 108  
Medicine for Women, London School of, 79, 80  
Melbourne, Lord, 153  
Meredith, George, 30, 49, 55, 185  
Merivale, Herman, 83  
Merivale, The Misses, 84  
Mill, John Stuart, 51, 87, 89 *seq.*, 172  
Miller, Mr. (Portsmouth undertaker), 134  
Missions: East End, foreign, medical, 88  
Montagu, Lady Mary Wortley, 15  
More, Hannah, 1, 16  
"Morning Post, The," 83  
Morris, William, 183  
Motherhood, the Right to, 181  
Mothers' Union, 222  
Mourey, Madame, 148  
Mudie's Library, 60  
Murray, Dr. Flora, 192  
Mussabini (S. Jacques), 146 *seq.*

NATIONAL ANTI-CONTAGIOUS DISEASES ACTS ASSOCIATION, 123  
National Council for Combating Venereal Diseases, 216  
"National Reformer, The," 103, 105  
National Society for Women's Suffrage, 90 *seq.*  
National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, 172, 192  
National Vigilance Association, 148

# INDEX

New Generation League, 209  
Newnham, 24, 59, 68 *seq.*, 83, 84  
Nightingale, Florence, 24, 77, 85  
*seq.*, 123  
North London Collegiate School for Girls, 63  
North of England Council for the Higher Education of Women, 69 *seq.*  
Norton, Caroline, 27, 28, 30, 55, 151 *seq.*, 161  
Norton, George, 152, 162  
Nudist colonies, 212  
Nursing, 85 *seq.*

**OWEN, ROBERT**, 100

**PAINE, TOM**, 103  
"Pall Mall Gazette, The," 144 *seq.*  
Pankhurst, Christabel, 173 *seq.*  
Pankhurst, Emmeline, 172 *seq.*, 193, 197, 217 *n.*  
Pankhurst, Richard Marsden, 172  
Pankhurst, Sylvia, 173  
Parry, Sir Edward, 86  
Peel, Sir Robert, 167  
Pitt, William, 168  
Place, Francis, 98 *seq.*, 103  
Ponsonby, Sir Henry, 148  
Portsmouth, pauper prostitutes of, 134  
Post Office Savings Bank, 84  
Prince Consort, The, 19, 115  
Prince Regent, The, 18, 19  
Property, 47 *seq.*, 150 *seq.*  
Prostitution, 13, 31, 37 *seq.*, 56, 110 *seq.*, 217

"QUEEN" NEWSPAPER, 83, 84  
Queen's College for Women, 62, 63, 81  
"Queen's Women," 116  
Queen Victoria, 18 *seq.*, 110, 160

**RATIONALIST PRESS ASSOCIATION**, 102

Reform Act, The, 1832, 47  
Reform Act, The New, 1867, 52  
Representation of the People Act, The, 1918, 201

Rescue Society, The, 118  
Right to Motherhood, The, 181  
Roe, Humphrey Verdon, 208  
Roos, Lord de, 155  
Rousseau, Jean Jacques, 11  
Royden, Maude, 209

**ST. JAMES'S DISTRICT, POLICE DIVISION OF**, 42, 141

Salisbury, Lord, 160  
Salvation Army, The, 88  
Sanger, Margaret, 209  
Scott, Benjamin, 142  
Scott, Sir Percy, 209  
Scottish Women's Hospitals, 192  
Secular Society, London, 103  
Settlements, East End, 88  
Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act, The, 1919, 202  
Shaftesbury, Lord, 141  
Shakespeare, William, 185  
Shaw, Bernard, 45  
Shaw, Flora, 83  
Sheridan, Richard Brinsley, 152  
Sheridan, Mrs. Tom, 152  
Siddons, Mrs., 8  
Sidgwick, Prof. Henry, 72  
Sisters of Charity, Protestant, 87  
Smyth, Dame Ethel, 197, 217*n.*  
Social Hygiene Council, British, 216  
Social Science Congress, 65, 123  
Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, 126  
Society of Friends, 124  
Solly, Mr., on venereal diseases, 135, 212  
Somerset, Georgiana Duchess of, 152  
Somerville, 74  
South African War, The, 170, 172, 173, 190, 191  
Stansfeld, James, 127 *seq.*  
Stead, Mrs., 123, 142  
Stead, W. T., 142 *seq.*, 176, 220  
Stephen, Sir James Fitzjames, Q.C., 20, 26, 55, 233  
Stirling-Maxwell, Sir William, 30  
Stopes, Dr. Marie Carmichael, 107, 203 *seq.*, 208  
Storks, Sir Henry, 124 *seq.*, 165  
Strachey, Mrs. Ray, 66

## INDEX

Suffrage, woman, 89 *seq.*, 170  
  *seq.*, 201  
"Suffragettes," 176 *seq.*  
Surgeons, Royal College of, First  
  woman member, 180  
Syphilis, 110 *seq.*

TALFOURD, THOMAS NOON, 151  
  *seq.*

Taylor, Helen, 90

"Times, The," 83, 105

Trade Boards Act, The, 1909, 35

Trall, Dr. R. T., 101

"UNMARRIED WIVES," 216

VENEREAL DISEASES, 32, 44 *seq.*,  
  110 *seq.*, 212 *seq.*

Venereal Diseases, National  
  Council for Combating, 216

Venereal Diseases, Royal Com-  
  mission on (1914-1916), 44,  
  213 *seq.*

Victoria, Queen, 18 *seq.*, 110, 160

Vigilance Association, National,  
  148

Vincent, Sir Howard, 140, 143

WAGES, INDUSTRIAL, 33 *seq.*

Wages, governess's, 60

Wages of middle-class women  
  workers, 13, 60, 88

Walpole, Horace, 2

War, The Boer (1880-1), 83

War, The Franco-Prussian, 84

War, The Great, 190 *seq.*

War, The South African, 170,  
  172, 173, 190, 191

"War" babies, 196

Watts, Charles, 102

Webb, Sidney, 36

Webster, Augusta, 63

Wells, H. G., 187 *seq.*

Westbury, Lord (Sir Richard  
  Bethell), 158 *seq.*

Westermarck, Edward, 183, 223

Wheeler, R. V., 203

William IV., 18

Wollstonecraft, Charles, 4

Wollstonecraft, Eliza, 13

Wollstonecraft, Everina, 13

Wollstonecraft, James, 4

Wollstonecraft, Mary, 1 *seq.*, 41,  
  54, 75, 221, 232, 234

Woman Suffrage, 89 *seq.*, 170  
  *seq.*, 201

Women's education, 2, 10, 23, 58  
  *seq.*, 233

Women's Legion, 194

Women's Social and Political  
  Union, 173 *seq.*, 191, 194

Women's Suffrage, National  
  Society for, 90 *seq.*

Women's Suffrage Societies,  
  National Union of, 172, 192

Women's Volunteer Reserve, 194

Wood, Mrs. Henry, 30

Woolcombe, Mr. T., 115

YORK, FREDERICK DUKE OF, 152

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